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SOLITARY GIRLS:
longing among wards of the state

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SOLITARY GIRLS:
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by

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Dedication

For the girls.

To live in exile
means to pack only
  what you can carry
to murmur in your sleep
  eyes half open
    back to the wall
to try to remember
as you dig your feet into the dirt,
take root once more.

Marina del Sol

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SOLITARY GIRLS:
longing among wards of the state

Marina del Sol, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisors: Pauline Turner Strong and Laura Lein

I am researching the experience of foster care drift. This term refers to children who are considered homeless because it is not clear where they are going next. Research shows that the majority of children who have experienced foster care drift lead unstable lives after reaching the age of eighteen. They have high levels of poverty, homelessness, and incarceration, lack the most basic literacy and life skills, do not sustain employment, and lack health care and mental health care.

The research is centered in a residential treatment center for girls. I conducted ethnographic research while working with about two dozen girls, aged seven to seventeen, on service-learning projects. The girls designed projects in which they developed a sense of helping someone else. Frequently these projects involved the making and exchange of material objects. Unfortunately, the institutional structure isn't set up to provide such activities on a regular basis.

My analysis focuses on how the girls use objects to gain social status and form bonds with others. I seek to understand the nature of their sense of ownership and

belonging in a group, which differ markedly from those valued outside the system. The skills the girls are practicing in the residential treatment center will serve them well in total institutions such as prisons and mental hospitals, but they will have a hard time succeeding in a job or educational setting.

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Chapter 1 Substitute Care: Institutions that Serve as Family

> She has this fear that she has no names that she has many names that she doesn't know her names… She has this fear that if she digs into herself she won't find anyone that when she gets "there" she won't find her notches on the trees the birds will have eaten all the crumbs She has this fear that she won't find the way back
>
> - Gloria Anzaldúa (Borderlands: La Frontera, 1987, p. 43)

INTRODUCTION

When a family is unable to procure the material resources necessary for survival, children are at greater risk of encountering unsafe conditions, and are, therefore, more likely to be exposed to state regulation in one form or another. Once identified by state agencies, an abused or neglected child enters into the foster care system and begins the ongoing process of court proceedings designed to identify a permanent living situation. The substitute care system includes a range of experiences. Ideally, a child will experience reunification with biological kin. In other cases, parental rights may be terminated. The substitute care system is what Goffman considers to be a total institution – "a social hybrid, part residential community, part formal organization" (1961, p. 12). Foster children enter into a total institution that provides care for basic needs, such as housing, medical treatment, food, etc. While residing within the substitute care system, children are also exposed to a bureaucracy of regimented rules, policies and procedures.

The role of substitute care, in theory, is temporary. In reality, the bureaucratic system is huge, and, despite the best of intentions, it is easy for individual children to become lost in the system. Under the belief that transience is bad for children, the United States government calls for permanency planning (Knitzer 1982 and Schwartz and

Fishman 1999). Under this mandate, foster children would either be returned to their biological homes or parental rights would be terminated and the child placed up for adoption. Policies surrounding permanent placement for children also required that children be placed in the least restrictive settings possible. After a child is placed within the foster care system, some children experience placement breakdown. Placement breakdown may occur due to: insufficient placement choices, foster care provider needs relief, foster care provider may not be able to cope with child's behavior, or unforeseeable changes in the foster care provider's circumstances, for example major medical illness (Festinger 1983, Knitzer 1982 and Schwartz and Fishman 1999). Long-term placements are further complicated because children must be placed in the least restrictive setting possible. Institutions within the system range from lock down hospital facilities to foster family environments. A child is assigned a level of care based on the specific needs of that child, and the specific foster placement and funds available to provide for the child's needs correspond to the level of care required by the child. As a result of placement breakdown and/or movement, many children are moved around within the substitute care system on a continual basis. Current strategies employed by the foster care system serve the needs of many foster children by enabling them to be placed in permanent settings in a more-timely manner than institutional processes might otherwise permit. However, for the segment of the foster care population that experiences difficulty finding a placement, an experience of constant moves among settings takes root (Festinger 1983, Knitzer 1982, Marek 1987, Penzerro 1992 and Wills 1970).

Foster care drift occurs when a ward of the state is not permanently placed within a familial setting due to repeated placement breakdown. Foster care drift impacts

children who have histories of severe abuse and are therefore unable to be placed back within their biological family and are also generally considered undesirable by potential adoptive families. Additionally, the child may display aggressive behaviors, have a tendency to run away or engage in drug use (Armstrong 1993, Pfeffer 1997, Rothman 1991 and Wade et al 1998). For children experiencing foster care drift, continual transience within the foster care system and relationships of estrangement dominate everyday encounters. They literally grow up while moving among temporary shelters, group homes and treatment facilities - all of which may be located in far reaching regions of the state.[1] As time passes, relationships with kin, often tenuous to begin with, break down as a result of frequent, long-distance moves and short, irregular visiting opportunities (Brandon 1996, Chase 1999, Howe 1996 and Lackie 1993). This makes it difficult for the youth to maintain a sense of continuity with a familial community. Experiences developing friendships, bonding with adult figures and establishing the continuity associated with a stable childhood remain out of the reach of most of these children. To complicate the situation, burn out and low incentives lead to a high turn-over rate among adults involved in these children's daily lives (Buckholt and Gubrium 1979, Schrager 1972).

Children who experience foster care drift are ultimately raised within institutions that socialize behavior that is not in line with familial settings. Once aging out of the foster care system, this population generally experiences difficulty integrating into mainstream society. It is commonplace for these youth, after reaching the age of

[1] The foster care system is coordinated at the state level. The vast majority of Texas foster children originated in Texas and remain in Texas, however there are exceptions. Texas is not unique facing these foster care issues and other states have the same issues.

majority, to find themselves in institutional settings that parallel the structures within which they were raised, such as the penal system, halfway houses or homeless shelters.

Although existing on the peripheries of society, children experiencing foster care drift continue to exist, and they adopt strategies that are intended to negotiate institutional systems while asserting their own beliefs. For children who end up being raised within the total institution of substitute care, their childhood socialization experience trains them to interact with institutional demands rather than to build inter-personal relationships. Children who are not placed in family settings encounter isolation and minimal opportunities to participate in non-institutional communities. These children, who are always starting over, lack adequate opportunities to build basic academic skills. Moreover, this experience fails to offer children opportunities to develop social skills, such as the ability to identify and maintain long-term, reliable networks, which are imperative for stable lifestyles in their future years. Youth are socialized to appeal to adults in order to acquire privileges, but not to develop relationships. Once in the system, youth find that they are able to more easily negotiate the system when they team up with other children in attempts to circumvent rules. The institutional system, which defines the youth's behavior as deviant, therefore causal of their life situation, stigmatizes the youth as inherently pathological (Armstrong 1993, Pfeffer 1997, Rothman 1991 and Wade et al 1998). The phenomenon of institutions that serve as family for youth is especially poignant in that these institutions seek to rehabilitate youth, both implicitly and explicitly using classifications to place responsibility for life circumstances onto them. Eventually, the majority of children who are raised in substitute care find themselves in the cycle of poverty, dangerous living conditions and material hardship from which they were originally removed – minus, of course, familial networks.

This dissertation research examines constructions of childhood among girls who are experiencing foster care drift in the state of Texas. This dissertation project is concerned with the ways in which institutional practices and continual immersion in institutional networks shape children's ideas about their relationship, or lack thereof, to social systems and institutional structures. The current literature does not examine the children's lives from the perspective of reciprocal – however unequal – constructions of meaning. This dissertation aspires to create a portrait of the lived experiences of girls experiencing foster care drift. In addition, this project seeks to understand: In what ways do girls being raised by the total institution of the foster care system conceptualize relationships and support networks? How do the girls negotiate meaning through the use of material practices? And, what is the nature of relationship building among girls who are being raised by institutions?

THE FIELD SITE

The research site for this project is a licensed, non-profit residential treatment center and foster home program that serves adolescent girls who have been labeled as "emotionally disturbed" as a result of severe sexual, physical and/or emotional abuse. In general, the residents are in the protective custody of the state. The primary, philosophical goals of this type of site include: (1) developing self-esteem and sensitivity to the needs of others, (2) developing the ability to exercise self-discipline and (3) developing a sense of purpose and direction. The entire program consists of foster group homes, individual housing units, a gym, a track and field, administrative offices, a small library, elementary and secondary charter schools, a full service cafeteria, an activity building, four "time out" rooms without doors and off-site therapeutic foster families.

Foster children at this site undergo a treatment program that is holistic in nature and offers programming addressing recreation, education, exercise and spirituality in addition to psychological therapy. The site is not a locked facility, but is considered to be a controlled environment through the use of physical holds on children, time out rooms, locked closets, etc. This site is ideal for this dissertation study because of its range of fostering services and the nature of the residential treatment facility as being the type of site where children experiencing foster care drift reside for the longest periods of time.

Children who are placed at this site often have records that include discipline problems, poor self-concepts, destructive behavior and failure in school. Destructive behavior might include: prostitution, running away, assault, suicide attempts, self-mutilation, theft, vandalism or substance abuse. The children who inhabit this site have not only been removed from their family of origin, but can be defined as "homeless" as a result of multiple, frequent and unpredictable moves among various facilities and foster homes. The most recent place of residence prior to admission for approximately half of the children was a foster group home or foster family. Children also arrive at the site from emergency shelters and psychiatric hospitals. The typical residency was approximately one-year, however, there were girls who had been residents for as long as four years or as short as a few days. The state determines a child's level of care according to the amount of attention the child requires from adults. As a child's level of care goes up or down, she may be relocated to either a locked facility or to a foster home. It is not uncommon for residents to be placed into a foster family or group home, and then to be unable to sustain the lower level of care, which is referred to as placement breakdown. For example, attempts to run away would impact a youth's level of care. When this happens, a child may sometimes return to the site or she may be sent to a

locked psychiatric facility, to prison or to another facility -- depending on caseworkers and legal proceedings.

PRELIMINARY PROJECTS AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS

My association with the research site began in May of 1998 through Project HELP (the Homeless Education and Learning Project). As a community educator for Project HELP, I designed and taught summer enrichment classes for girls. A few of the classes I taught included: math, campus newsletter, dance, swimming, social studies and creative arts. Subsequently, I conducted a practicum project funded by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation and four preliminary studies that examined the experiences of direct care staff, foster parents, volunteers and foster children. The practicum project and preliminary studies allowed me to develop not only projects and activities with the girls housed at the foster care facilities, but to establish and develop longer-term relationships with them. This deeper relationship with the girls permitted me to observe and interact with them during their daily routines and activities in a natural manner. The unique opportunity to interact with the girls and staff on a personal level eventually lead to my current dissertation project that focuses on how meanings of family, institutional structures and material culture shape the foster girls' identity, and how they see and interpret their experiences of travel within the foster care system. Furthermore, the practicum project and preliminary studies allowed the foster girls and the direct care staff to more fully understand what type of interactions and observations would occur during my field work at the substitute care facility. The girls understanding of the research project was important so that they could act as informed subjects with their own autonomy in determining if and when they wanted to participate in the research

activities. Ultimately, the preliminary studies created the foundation for what would eventually become this final dissertation research project that focuses on the lives of foster girls in the substitute care system.

Summer 1999: Woodrow Wilson Practicum Project

During the summer of 1999, I organized and implemented a project funded with a Woodrow Wilson Practicum Grant under the Humanities at Work Program. As a phenomenological endeavor, this project sought to enable girls to explore relationships between anthropology and their own lives. The girls actively involved in this project were between 12 and 17. The project provided kinesthetic activities that converged around expressive practices, such as dance, music, performance and narrative. The first project goal was to explore ways to increase self-esteem through promoting self-efficacy. The second goal was to explore issues of gender and ethnic identity. The third goal was to experience new possibilities for relating self with society. These goals are particularly important for these youth. Many feel abandoned by both their families of origin and by society in general. This adds to perceptions of self that are generally low and unfavorable.

The epistemological make-up of this project was that of a short term three month project placed within a web of longer term experiences that began before the start of the project and have continued after its completion. All participation was to be voluntary. With the input of the girls, I selected five themes: Selena & Mexican-American Cultural Productions, African-American Spiritual Traditions, Civil Rights in the United States, International Folk Dance and Texas Culture Field Trips. For the Selena strand, eight girls

met twice a week for an hour and a half to explore their devotion to Selena. They learned how to dance *cumbia*, and we created poster board presentations that represented Selena as a cultural icon. This led to a dialog about their personal identities in relation to the representations of Selena in popular culture. At the end of the project, six of the girls gave a choreographed performance to *Baila Esta Cumbia*. There was great debate over what moves were most representative of Selena. At the request of Jennifer, a fifteen-year old African-American teenager who was an avid writer of poetry, we explored gospel music. We attended Sunday workshop services and spoken word events at a local Baptist church. Angela, a sixteen-year-old Mexican-American, wanted to learn more about slavery and oppression. For her narratives of overcoming extreme adversity were empowering, and she saw them as directly connected to her life. Three other teenagers, Angela, Veronica and Samantha, participated with her in weekly, discussion groups focused on the Civil Rights era of the 60's and explored civil rights as they applied to the girls' lives. For the Texas Culture Field Trips, we visited the Texas Institute of Cultures in San Antonio, explored local historical buildings, attended poetry readings by Lorna Dee Cervantes, Raul Salinas and Willie Perdomo and, visited a Hindu temple. This practicum project sought to make connections between academia and community work and to develop practical applications of anthropology based programming for youth.

Fall 1999 Preliminary Study: Practices Among Direct Care Staff[2]

Language, both in the form of narrative and terminology, produces shared experience and negotiates discontinuity. In the residential treatment center, jargon

[2] This project was supervised by Dr. Laura Lein.

permeates speech. Terminology often takes the form of labeling behavior and definitions of specific terms are not always shared by the treatment center, by the state, by direct care staff and children. Moreover, relations of power and funding impact how labels change over time. Terminology is also used to demarcate boundaries of time and space, to create both artificial divisions and inclusions. In this sense, the framing of mundane and "crisis" time, or liminal time, relies on the organization of space and people.

As a phenomenological endeavor, this project sought a better understanding of practices used by direct care staff in socializing children. The central question of this study of direct care staff was: What practices do direct care staff use in negotiating situations of liminality and in socializing children? Given the relevance of beliefs about stigma, rehabilitation and language use in daily practices at the site, my sub-questions were as follows: (1) What and who defines success? (2) What role does stigma play in the relationship between staff and residents? (3) What are the differences, if any, between mundane and "crisis" time? What methods are used to frame these times? and (4) What is the role and function of narrative in relation to audience? These sub-questions provided me with the framework through which to examine the methods that direct care staff employ in managing multiple levels of responsibility. The methods used in this project included: participant observation, informal questioning and archival data. Participant observation was conducted during the final hours of direct care shifts after the children had been put to bed and when staff reviewed the day. Short informal questions were used to elicit elaboration on data collected during observation. Finally, archival research, including blank paperwork forms, worker handbooks and policy documents were used to provide a context for understanding direct care staffs' understanding of their job.

The study found that direct care staff use language as a means of maintaining boundaries between self, child and trauma. Practices of distancing included the use of jargon, time outs (for both children and adults) and humor in the forms of mimicry and dark humor. Direct care staff would slip into a language heavily filled with jargon when speaking about a particularly disturbing incident, when dealing with a child who was not following their directions or when filling out paperwork for the government. When addressing a child's anger at not being able to watch a designated television show, direct care staff would report themselves as saying something along the lines of: "you are not on a level to do that" or "you can earn that privilege for tomorrow." Jargon included words such as: verbally processing, argumentative, crisis, splitting and prog (short for progress notes). Jargon functioned to separate people into categories and was a means of communicating during periods of elevated stress. The use of jargon is assumed to have clear, shared meaning to all participants, which minimizes confusion. However, during times of elevated stress staff report vastly differing accounts of the same event and do report experiencing confusion. Distancing through "time out's," which creates physical distance, was also used to either avoid or deal with times of stress for both children and adults. When visibly upset a child might be given the option of or required to take a "time out" in a seat away from others or in a separate room. A time out might last for a few minutes or for several days at a time. For adults, a time out could only last a few minutes and was taken in the office, which was separated from the main area by a large window. In the course of this direct care staff study, performances related to humor by direct care staff were frequent. Overall, direct care staff experience the residential treatment center as a site of containment. This containment is seen as necessary in order to avoid contamination and chaos. Moreover, they must "manage" the behavior of

multiple children who are determined to have high levels of care. The number of urgent needs create an atmosphere in which longer-term needs are easily pushed to the background. This makes it difficult to focus on long-term consequences or to devote too much attention to any one area. Thus, their consciousness is shaped in terms of immediacy and the overall needs of groups of children. Strategies of jargon, "time out' and dark humor were regular strategies called upon by direct care staff in completing their daily job responsibilities and for managing stressful working conditions.

Spring 2000 Preliminary Study: Foster Families and Socialization Processes[3]

Even though foster families and foster group homes are often treated as endpoints of successful habilitation, in many cases a cyclical relationship exists between foster family placement and institutional placement. The objective of placing children in the least restrictive (also the cheapest) environment possible coupled with the fluctuation of levels of care creates a situation in which children must be moved between facilities on an ongoing basis. In a therapeutic fostering situation, suicidal or homicidal behavior, the inability to attend public school or running away will increase the level of care, and the perceived need for a more restrictive setting according to state mandates. Ideally, the child returns to the same foster home. However, placement is not solely based on treatment objectives. Each foster family or foster group home has a given number of slots to fill for budgetary purposes.

This preliminary project examined how foster parents negotiate institutional systems that are riddled with bureaucracy when working with girls who require

[3] This project was supervised by Dr. Laura Lein.

therapeutic interaction. Efforts to humanize a dehumanizing process mark the experiences of foster parents. This foster parent study sought to understand: In what ways do foster parents attempt to make sense out of state mandated and organically occurring processes as they socialize foster children? The sub-questions of the foster parent study included: How do foster parents view their role in child socialization? What practices do foster parents prefer to use when working with children? What techniques do they consider to be effective or ineffective? How do they understand their role in carrying out institutional socialization techniques? The methods used in this project included: participant observation, informal interviewing and archival data. Participant observation was conducted during both formal and informal foster parent training. Short informal interviewing also played a key role in illuminating data collected during observations and in augmenting sketchy areas of the data. Finally, archival research, including blank paperwork forms, orientation materials, recruitment brochures and policy documents, shed light on the process of recruiting and socializing potential foster families in institutional practices and policy.

Foster parents, who experience family living with fewer children, are able to give focused attention to a child for extended periods of time. This foster parent study found that this environment enables foster parents to look towards the future. When discussing children, foster parents use concrete examples to explain specific behaviors. They tend to use everyday life examples that provide a context and connection between cause and effect. For example, when describing a situation of conflict with a child a foster parent gave this example: "____, you cannot watch your television show because you did not clean your room." In this case, the foster parent reflects back to a child the correlation between cause and effect in practical terms. Moreover, foster parents consistently

express emotion regarding the development of their foster children. When speaking about socializing their foster children they focus on the future. Statements such as: "I'm scared for her." "There's no win-win situation here." "How is she going to hold down a job with her uncontrollable anger?" They express concern about what will happen to the children when they turn eighteen and leave the state system. They tend to verbalize a direct connection between behavioral issues, such as extreme rudeness to authority figures, and survival on a material level, such as holding down a job by getting along with one's employer. Overall, this foster parent study found that the therapeutic foster parenting experience is grounded in concrete and specific events and consists of an emotional investment in the long-term future of their foster children.

Spring 2001 Preliminary Study: Material Culture among Girls in State's Care[4]

In the United States, we value the ability to acquire material objects. Even after possessing material objects that far exceed perceived needs, individuals tend to continue in the pursuit of obtaining even higher status objects. This practice has a significant meaning for children who are experiencing foster care drift. The experience of continual movement makes hanging onto material objects quite a challenge. These children have relatively few possessions, and those that they do have are quickly lost and replaced. For this reason, material objects take on new meanings. The relationship between identity, the possession of objects and personal history takes on different social meanings.

This study looked at material culture practices among elementary school age girls who are in residential treatment. This project's central question was: In what ways do

[4] This project was supervised by Dr. Pauline Turner Strong.

objects represent an attempt to internalize an external world? In what ways, if any, does the desire to attain an elusive sense of belonging manifest itself through seeking representational objects? Sub-questions included: What types of objects do girls identify as prized and what are their explanations as to why it is valued? Are objects important to the girls? What do the girls see as the significance of personal objects? In order to come to an understanding of the answers to these questions, the methods used in this project included: a research subject project, participant observation, informal questioning and archival data. The subjects in this project, six foster children, were asked to either photograph or write about their most cherished possession. Each was offered the opportunity to create a life size self-portrait outline, if she so chose. The girls then had the opportunity to exhibit their artwork and photographs.

Spring 2002 Preliminary Study: Volunteerism - a Case Study[5]

For children who are experiencing foster care drift, the idea that people are paid to take care of them and that nobody wants them is common. As a result of this, volunteers have special meaning for children. A volunteer is someone who wants to spend time with a particular child, someone who does not have to take on this role, but does anyway. More often than not, a volunteer is the only person who has had a relationship with a given child over an extended period of time. As adults move in and out of jobs and go on and off shifts, children are left feeling that they cannot depend on any particular individual. For some of the more fortunate children in the system, a volunteer takes on this role. Children who are involved in lengthy court proceedings may be assigned a

[5] This project was supervised by Dr. Laura Lein.

Court Appointed Special Advocate or CASA Volunteer. This volunteer commits to being with a child throughout court proceedings, however it is common for these volunteers to continue on in a child's life after their official time has ended. There are also programs at the research site that match children with an adult, long-term volunteer. Due to the significance of volunteer activity in the children's lives this project explored the experience of two volunteers, one of whom was the researcher herself.

The literature on volunteerism notes that personal history, work experience, family and education direct the experience of volunteer work. These factors influence volunteers in their decision to engage in volunteer behavior and in their likelihood to initiate relationships with a given site. This project's research question was: In what ways do volunteers negotiate decision-making processes? Sub-questions included: What do volunteers identify as their motivations for volunteer behavior? How do volunteers view their role in the lives of those for whom they volunteer? How do volunteers see the perimeters of their responsibilities and roles? In what ways, if any, do volunteers identify connections between their everyday lives and volunteer work? This study of volunteers applied a case study model consisting of two subjects, the researcher and a co-worker. During this study on volunteers, participant observation and informal interviews were used in order to promote an ethnographic understanding of the meaning of being a volunteer. As a project that strove to create dialog while recognizing barriers to communication, this study took a feminist approach to research. In order to fully engage vulnerable questioning of assumed ideas, this project incorporated the researcher into its data analysis, which will be illuminated by a feminist approach. On-going dialog with a focus on mutual understanding, without an expectation of agreement, functions as the most important method utilized in this study. Being one’s own subject poses unique

challenges, yet this experience can be highly useful in bringing preconceived ideas about the meaning of activities and events to the forefront. In thinking about the meaning of events and key themes, I found myself struggling to make connections that were not fraught with my own language and to refrain from privileging my personal views.

This study of volunteers found that career goals, personal satisfaction and financial stress were recurrent themes for subjects throughout the period study. Also, a secondary theme emerged in the context of this study: volunteer as social misfit. The attitude that the volunteers had difficulty fitting into socially construed categories, especially in relation to the intersections of political ideology, spirituality and expectations about marriage, repeatedly emerged. Long-term career and personal development goals played a marked role in the decision to volunteer. Volunteers felt emotional gratification during and after time spent volunteering. Additionally, they were able to pursue personal interests through their volunteer work. As a whole, personal satisfaction and the feeling of "success" that emerged when overcoming an obstacle were primary motivators for volunteer behavior in this study. Financial pressures remained an all-encompassing concern throughout this study. There were financial strains in two areas: personal income and organizational funding. In short, financial strains and the availability of resources impacted general satisfaction with volunteer activity. Although the volunteers perceived themselves as highly social individuals with far-reaching networks of friends and of acquaintances, they felt that their lives were compartmentalized and that no social group was a perfect fit. While volunteer work was not a substitute for social relationships, they recognized it as filling a social void in relation to activism in their lives.

FIELDWORK METHODS

This current dissertation project is the culmination of the dissertation fieldwork, four preliminary studies and a practicum project, which were conducted in order to provide important qualitative data. The preliminary studies and practicum project were central in setting the groundwork for this dissertation. Not only did the preliminary studies provide invaluable opportunities for developing mutual relationships in the field setting, but they also provided an additional means for triangulating the dissertation fieldwork data. Furthermore, each of the preliminary studies focused on a unique group of interlocutors who were involved in the foster care site where I conducted my dissertation field research. One preliminary study focused on the experiences of foster parents who provided homes for some of the girls when they were discharged from the site. Another study focused on direct care staff that worked at the facility, and another study focused on volunteers who were involved in the foster girls' lives at the facility. The final preliminary study focused on foster girls who lived at the facility. Volunteers, foster parents and staff are the adult figures that interact with the girls and provide for their direct needs on a daily or weekly basis. Additionally, one study and one practicum project with the girls provided the foundation for the service learning projects which would become central to the dissertation fieldwork. The practicum project involved the girls who resided at the facility with a focus on anthropology and cultural traditions. The girls participated in several projects or activities that they chose to focus on for the practicum project that ranged from civil rights to poetry readings to participating in different dance traditions. The fieldwork for this dissertation research took place from March 2003 to September 2003. The research methods included: participant

observation, informal interviews, archival research and service learning projects with subjects.

In order to gain insight into the lived experience of girls in state's care, this dissertation study included participant observation with subjects as they engaged in their daily routines. What specifically constitutes participant observation has been debated, and definitions range along a continuum - from looking in as an outsider to taking on responsibilities that identify one as a full-fledged member of a community (Dewalt et al 1998). Participant observation has been used not only to refer to ethnographic activity, but also to include all research activity, including formal interviewing. Given that this dissertation research is with children, participant observation was based in the cultivation of relationships of mentorship, rather than ones of peer activity. Through incorporating participant observation, a stronger rapport was developed with subjects (Dewalt et al 1998). Participant observation included, but was not limited to activities such as: sharing meals, completing chores, interacting in recreational activities, reading at bed time, attending special events or holiday celebrations, sitting in on support groups and other structured group activities, etc. Immersion in these forms of activities enriched the data collection process and provided a deeper observation of daily life experiences. Furthermore, participant observation provided a means of triangulating data elicited through informal interviews.

Archival data was pivotal in the data collection for this dissertation project because it provided a method for triangulation and for discerning categories pertinent to the lived experience of the interlocutors. Archival data came in two forms: public documents used to represent the girls to the general public and blank internal documents which collect information for the state. Public documents, including public relations

materials and blank forms for paperwork, provided points of reference for understanding policy, procedure and relationships within the institutional structure. Documents also included brochures and videos that are used for fundraising purposes and to recruit volunteers. The second essential form of archival data used for this dissertation project included blank documents that were used internally. These forms include: case files, progress notes and staffing reports. Case files include known information regarding a child's history, school attendance, etc. For most children experiencing foster care drift, there are huge gaps in the files. For example, it may be unknown if and where a child attended school over extensive periods of time. In addition to case files, progress notes are daily notes completed by direct care staff that monitor daily behavior and activities. Progress notes chronicle the child's daily activity from the time she wakes up until the time she goes to sleep. Progress notes also contain specific goals for children, such as "attend school," and the child's progress in meeting those goals is noted on the forms. Staffing reports are completed every three months. A staffing consist of a meeting between child, staff, caseworkers and administrators during which they discuss the child's progress towards meeting "treatment objectives," which will enable them to move on to foster homes or group homes. During a staffing a child is given the opportunity to express her desire to pursue specific goals. After the staffing a report is drawn up detailing the child's goals for the next three months. Both external and blank internal archival materials add depth to understanding the nature of the bureaucracy.

Fieldwork methods for this project also included service learning activities. The researcher worked with research participants in order to develop and implement several projects. Sticker Study Hall was a daily, hour long homework time designed to enable children to complete schoolwork while increasing self-efficacy through peer teaching.

During Sticker Study Hall, participants earned stickers for using positive social behaviors that were defined by the group themselves. At the end of Sticker Study Hall, participants had the opportunity to teach a part of their homework to others. During this activity, students practiced presentation skills and listening skills. At the end of Sticker Study Hall, the student or students with the most stickers were recognized by the group and did a promenade to a song. A project called Wacko Matho used life size math projects, such as 3x3x3 feet dice, and movement games to explore the relevance of math in our daily lives. We also had a campus newsletter for sharing news and producing literary booklets. In Project SASSY, the children chose to complete a service learning project to benefit the local Blue Santa program. We made yarn dolls, each of whom had a name and personal history that came with her, which we raffled off to earn money. With the money the girls purchased gifts to donate to Blue Santa. Not only did we drop off the gifts, but we went as a group to deliver gifts in mid-December. After deliveries were made the children were invited to eat a barbeque meal with other volunteers and the Police Chief.

This dissertation research included two dozen girls between the ages of seven and seventeen. The girls were allowed to participate in the research activities as they desired and were free to not participate at any time without consequence. All participants were Anglo-American, African-American or Mexican-American.[6] The girls had all resided at the facility from three months to five years. However, this facility is designed to serve girls for only one year because it is a restrictive setting. All participants had lived in

[6]The racial demographics of the children residing in this facility mirrored the demographics of the Texas foster care population. The participants in this study also reflected the racial demographics of children in the Texas foster care system. In 2003, the Texas foster care population of children by race was: Hispanic 36.8%, White 33.2%, Black non-Hispanic 25.6%, Two or more races 3.2%, Asian .4%, Native American .2%. In 2003, the general population of children residing in Texas by race was: 42.2% White, 41.8% Hispanic, 11.9% Black non-Hispanic, 2.5% Asian, 1.3% Two or more races and .3% Native American (Children's Bureau (ACYF, ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2003).

Texas since birth. All participants were under the guardianship of the state. Only one of the participants had an ongoing, positive relationship with a biological parent. The rest of the girls either did not have contact with biological kin, or they had random, infrequent contact.

HELPING OUT: CONSENT, ASSENT AND HUMAN SUBJECTS

This section focuses on the ethical issues associated with research subjects involved in this dissertation study. In order to guard against ethical dilemmas, this project has been submitted to and approved by a human subjects committee. Potential ramifications for research subjects have been thought through in this process and procedures for dealing with ethical issues have been outlined. The procedure for obtaining informed consent for youth was twofold: First, the consent of the adult responsible for the youth was obtained in writing; second, the assent of the youth was obtained in writing. An oral explanation of the research project was also given. The research was explained to the youth in age appropriate language that she could understand. Subjects were informed of the option to remove themselves from the study at any point without any consequence.

As with most research, there are potential risks and benefits for both subjects and society in general. Potential risks to the subjects are psychological and social. The psychological risks include the stress of being observed and the fear of being judged. If at any time a subject expressed discomfort with a research activity, the activity was halted. The risks of this study are minimal due to the nature of the facility. Subjects are accustomed to being observed on a regular basis by adults who are interested in

becoming involved at the facility and by auditing organizations. The environment is also one that promotes the disclosure of past abuse. Therefore the facility has protocol in place for addressing legal situations that arise when abuse is disclosed. Social risk was limited by reminding subjects of their right to confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any point. The benefits of this study largely outweigh the risks. The benefits of this study include, but are not limited to: personal interest being expressed towards the subjects and the attention and presence of an extra adult. Participation in this study provided subjects with additional time engaged in activities they consider enjoyable. The research site benefited through the presence of an additional adult on campus, volunteer hours and the development of programs held after school and during school breaks. Subjects had opportunities to experience positive connections with others that would not otherwise have occurred.

Conventionally, anthropologists minimize social and emotional risks by carefully guarding the identity of the subjects through the use of pseudonyms. To avoid accidental embarrassment, I used pseudonyms for the youth to prevent inadvertent harm resulting from my research. In most cases, each girl selected her own pseudonym. If a girl was not able to or did not choose to select a pseudonym, then I assigned one to her. I selected common names in order to ensure confidentiality. Within the research site, confidentiality was maintained by referring to the girls by initials (e.g., AH, SG, etc.).

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The second chapter of this dissertation focuses on scholarship regarding substitute care, the state and poverty, violence and narrative. This literature provides the starting

point for an examination of the experiences of wards of the state within the institutional structure. The studies discussed in this chapter raise important issues such as the effect that foster care drift has on identity formation and power relationships among foster care youth, the role that the state plays in creating and maintaining unequal power relationships and how narratives provide insights into understanding these complex relationships through concepts such as trauma, loss and control. Collectively, these studies provide a foundation for examining the lived experiences of youth in foster care.

The three chapters of analysis use case studies to illustrate snapshots of the girls lived experiences. Case studies were chosen as a method of representation because they emphasize detailed and contextual descriptions of specific experiences. The case studies selected for this dissertation highlight the manner in which objects and people travel throughout the girls' lives. Given that the girls who inhabit the substitute care system experience high degrees of transition and temporality compared to most children in U.S. society, case studies are able to provide details that add depth to the girls' life experiences, which would not be as fully understood through other methods. Case studies, in general, enable a deeper understanding of the subject in a specified time and place.

Chapter 3 explores how longing and loss are a common experience among wards of the state, and how those experiences shape identities that are played out among themselves and with society. This chapter begins by presenting an ethnographic narrative describing a snapshot of a mini-vacation with the foster girls to the zoo. This particular narrative provides insight into the pervasive loss and continual change that mark the experiences of wards of the state. Moreover, it elucidates the ways in which wards of the state construct strategies or behaviors in order to deal with the constant loss surrounding

them (i.e., separation from family, high turnover rate of direct care workers, the constant temporality of their place within the foster care system). Moreover, this narrative provides the groundwork for a theoretical framework that assists us in understanding the power dynamics, or struggles, that emerge among the girls, as well as the relations of power that emerge between them and the agents of the institution (i.e., case workers, foster parents, volunteers). Overall, the girls' experiences of loss, and how they express desire and longing, is multifaceted. They may develop particular behaviors or attributes that are commonly construed as maladaptive, however, in reality, these responses are simply a reflection of the unstable world in which they reside.

Chapter 4 provides a specific case study to illustrate the macro effects of control and socialization by the state/institution on vulnerable individuals, such as foster care youth. This social control by the state of what is deemed appropriate furthers the impact that the institutional structure has on identity formation. The case study is an analysis of Baby Think It Over, an invention with the purpose of attempting to curtail teen pregnancy. This chapter is also accompanied by an ethnographic vignette to demonstrate the social impacts such a device (literal and metaphorical) has on young girls in the foster care system. This narrative provides evidence of a theoretical structure that strives to answer questions regarding behavior modification and the processes of conceptualizing meaning. Baby Think It Over reveals the paradox of the state's attempt to control foster girls' behavior when meanings of objects and structures easily change depending on the perspective of whoever may possess the item at any given time.

Chapter 5 discusses the connection between material culture and meaning in the lives of the young girls from this particular foster care facility. This chapter is the result of a project created with the girls that became part of a larger exhibit at the University of

Texas at Austin entitled Memoryscapes: An Exhibition of Memory, Trauma and Tourism. The project with the girls examined the meanings that are embedded in prized possessions and looks at patterns of exchange. The analysis of this exhibit and the events leading up to it provide insight into cultural practices where material objects reveal the dynamics of status and power among the girls themselves, childhood memories within an unstable and temporal social space and a longing for a sense of belonging and feeling important. This chapter emphasizes the intersections between identity and material culture, and how these particular cultural crossroads reveal a more complex picture regarding the experiences of foster girls in state custody.

Chapter 6 provides a summary of the present study. Also, it converses with current and past research studies regarding foster children to offer recommendations for future studies. The three sections of this chapter are "Conversing with Existing Research," "Implications for Education and Practice" and "Suggestions for Future Research." The current dissertation project enters into a discussion with past research studies in the first section to determine what parallels exist, as well as to discuss areas of investigation that this dissertation research study is focusing on that past research projects have not considered. Other longitudinal studies of residential facilities that serve foster children exist but are few in number. Most past studies focused on caregivers or interviewed children once they had already aged out of care. This dissertation project provides a different approach by observing children while they are still in the foster care system. The second section offers suggestions of how this dissertation can be used in improving services to foster children as well as how current institutional structures like the substitute care system can be restructured to assist with these services. Suggestions include the implementation of more training programs for adults that work in direct care

facilities as well as the creation of policies that ensure the permanency of direct care workers over long periods of time. The final section discusses potential research projects for the future that focus on areas of concern that have not yet been addressed by past studies such as new institutional policies regarding adolescents in the foster care system whom are pregnant or reworking definitions of aggression for boys and girls in the substitute care system.

Chapter 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide an outline of the literature used as a theoretical basis for this study as well as the theoretical frameworks that will be addressed and analyzed throughout this dissertation in relation to children and the foster care system. These frameworks will focus on institutional structures such as the substitute care system, and its role in child development, and ultimately in defining meanings of family. Other theoretical frameworks will focus on issues regarding resources and social networks. The final theoretical approach will focus on the use of narrative as means to attempt to deal with problems of violence and trauma. The theoretical literature used to support these frameworks will focus on theories regarding the development of institutional or state structures, and how they affect an individual's social development and identity formation. Literature will be included that focus on family networks systems, and how poverty affects these networks within the context of the larger society. Finally, I will include theories that analyze violence and trauma, and their effects on the development of individuals. Furthermore, theories regarding the use of narrative to address, or even avoid trauma will be considered to better understand how foster children deal with trauma in an institutional setting such as the substitute care system.

Conceptions about the meaning of family are shaped in particular ways for children who are being raised in substitute care institutions. For girls who are experiencing foster care drift during their formative years, the concept of family takes on alternative meanings. Their personal experiences of family vacillate between idealistic

expectations and forlorn alienation. The development of relationships and networks that meet material and emotional needs takes on different dimensions for children who are not raised in family settings. For girls growing up in the peripheral social spaces of the foster care system, issues of belonging become especially significant and contested categories. Who belongs to a group becomes extremely fluid in a context of an ever-changing social milieu. For these reasons, this project will employ Gubrium and Holstein's social constructivist model of family as practice. This model is instrumental in drawing attention to the significance of informal formations of family that might otherwise remain camouflaged (Gubrium and Holstein 1990). Formations of family include, but are not limited to: nuclear, extended, single parent, adoptive, multi-ethnic, blended families and circles of non-related kin (Gubrium and Holstein 1990). Individuals frequently hold membership in more than one discrete family. For example, an individual who resides in a single parent household may also have necessary networks of extended family and of friends who serve in roles traditionally associated with family. The ways in which institutions classify familial relationships is particularly important for families that rely on non-kin networks for support.

In the United States today, there are varied formations of family, both acknowledged and not acknowledged by institutions. In some cases, one institution may recognize relationships, while another institution may discredit the same relationships. Institutions define the rights of individuals to claim benefits and to determine the placement of youth when a primary caregiver becomes unavailable. For these reasons, institutional categories shape both formal and informal formations of family. The following section discusses the theoretical underpinnings of notions of family and the negotiation of meaning. The theories focused on in this section will provide a lens

through which to interpret the unique experiences of girls who are raised in substitute care.

SUBSTITUTE CARE

Substitute care makes short-term, emergency decisions for youth that determine the direction of their long-term future. Institutions that serve as homes for children during their formative years offer them no stable adult figures, and the institutional systems uproot children frequently. Children who are experiencing foster care drift are classified as homeless. Within any given week, child-care workers rotate on and off of work shifts and biological kin may float in and out of a child's life (Buckholt and Gubrium 1979; Festinger 1983; Hinings 1996; Schrager 1972). The uncomfortable, artificial environments to which parents must submit in order to visit with their children, similar in nature to visits with inmates, further strains family contact (Hinings 1996). Institutional ethnographies of children who are raised within residential institutions note the prevalence of constant moves among institutions, which socializes children to behave in ways that will lead to similar habits and institutional involvement as adults (Marek 1987; Penzerro 1992; Wills 1970). This is particularly problematic in that similar institutions that serve adults, in addition to being sites of extreme stigma, tend to perpetuate cycles of impoverishment, lack of resources and lack of opportunities to make significant life changes.

The substitute care system pays minimal attention to the expressed desires of youth because they are considered unable to make decisions regarding their well being. Former foster children describe feelings of exasperation at the system's unwillingness to allow children to voice their desires (Festinger 1983). According to Festinger's work,

youth do not feel responded to by the foster care system, and they do not feel that they have any control over their lives. The Texas Foster Care Transitions Project, a study on youth aging out of the foster care system, notes the precarious situation of foster children who are moving into independent living due to: a lack of preparation, untreated heath and mental health problems, homelessness, financial insecurity, risky behavior (in the form of drug use, dropping out of school, early pregnancy, criminal activity and victimization), and fear and loneliness (Hormuth et al 2001). Studies concur that foster children who age out of the system encounter an adult world for which they are not fully equipped to succeed. Not only do children who age out of the foster care system have to face extreme obstacles in transitioning into independent living, but they also carry with them the added weight of histories of abuse and of institutional indifference. Many youth feel ambivalent about maintaining relationships with their biological kin networks. Parallel institutions, such as prison, homeless shelters and psychiatric facilities, will be environments that do not require individuals to attach to others and will provide formations of community that mimic their childhood experience.

Despite the reality that the system creates a lack of coherence, growing up within an institutional setting is seen by the state as preferable to having contact with one continuous parent who may be unable to meet material needs. Given the links between poverty and state involvement in children's lives, studies that look at the social and material conditions experienced by many foster children will provide a foundation for this proposed study. Experiences of poverty put youth at high risk for entering the foster care system (Armstrong 1995). Children from backgrounds of poverty are frequently taken into state custody as a result of "neglect" stemming from material hardship whereas children from backgrounds of privilege would not be taken into custody. When material

needs go unmet, children become at risk to have substantial interactions with institutions, such as temporary shelters, juvenile detention centers or child protective services. These institutions have the function of distancing individuals from families that have been stigmatized as "unfit" in order to habilitate or rehabilitate a youth.

Families experiencing poverty encounter material hardships that continually reconstitute oppressive living conditions, thus preventing families from escaping poverty in the long term. The current welfare system does not enable a family to meet basic needs. Furthermore, most employment opportunities available to mothers experiencing poverty do not provide a living wage (Edin and Lein 1997; Mink 1998). Families attempting to transition between welfare and employment face significant challenges to receiving adequate medical attention and to maintaining housing (Edin and Lein 1997). Conditions that constitute inadequate housing include: the failure of garbage removal, non-functioning stove or refrigerator, plumbing problems, faulty electricity, lack of heat, broken windows, leaking roofs, rat and roach infestations and the need to double up with other families (Edin and Lein 1997). In many cases, families are forced into homelessness or transitory living environments, which pose increased challenges and risks to personal safety (Connolly 2000; Epps 1998; Pfeffer 1997). In addition to situations of homelessness, Edin and Lein cite the following material needs frequently forgone by single mothers on welfare: food, winter clothing, telephone services, utilities, medical care and adequate housing (1997).

Prolonged periods of poverty increase the likelihood that families will experience excessive negative contact with legal systems (Armstrong 1993; Armstrong 1995; Brandon 1996; Epps 1998; Festinger 1983; Knitzer 1982). The state considers conditions that threaten child safety to be those that threaten life or limb (Brandon 1996).

Therefore, children from impoverished backgrounds are at high risk for entering the foster care system (Armstrong 1995). For working mothers, the expenses of child-care may necessitate leaving younger children alone or in situations deemed unacceptable by government agencies. Situations such as these mentioned may cause the care giving practices of mothers experiencing poverty to be characterized as "unfit." According to Connolly, state institutions demonize mothers who fail to meet a child's material needs (2000). Rather than looking at the social systems that create an environment of poverty, state institutions challenge the mother's ability to function as a competent care-giver (Armstrong 1993; Knitzer 1982). When it comes to families experiencing poverty, the state maintains a system that enforces an ideology that suggests that it is better to have no parent than an inadequate parent. As a result, children from poor neighborhoods surrounded by dangerous conditions are significantly more likely to be removed from family and placed into institutions. The state finds it preferable to spend tax dollars supporting the expense of keeping a child in state care rather than raising welfare benefits. Maintaining the substitute care system requires funding for workers, assessments, medical examinations, court costs, etc. The state finds it in the best interest of children to use institutionalization as an alternative to assisting families in staying together.

Ultimately, the substitute care system is seen as an adequate solution in response to families who are unable to provide the minimal care necessary to their children as defined by the state. The state prefers a systematic approach to dealing with poverty stricken families, rather than analyzing them case by case to differentiate between families who care about their children but do not have economic means to provide what is necessary, and families that are taking advantage of their children emotionally and

financially. The state's priority is immediate, temporary needs instead of lending resources to programs that will benefit the long-term development of children that are placed in the foster care system. In what ways can the foster care system be restructured to better address the long-term needs of children who are placed in this state institution, and how can the state reevaluate funding programs and individuals that benefit from the current system in order to assist families that are most susceptible to being split up due to policies that harm poor families?

RESOURCES: NETWORKS OF ECONOMIC AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Mothers facing poverty must overcome obstacles, such as living in crime infested areas and working odd hours that prevent them from spending time with their children and from protecting their children from harm. Attachment theory, which places responsibility for a child's sense of well-being on the primary caregiver, characterizes some mothers facing poverty as unstable figures. The following section of this paper examines the literature on attachment theory and on state use of substitute care institutions to socialize youth. Through etching out the connections between conditions of poverty and institutional classifications that work to stigmatize families, this section seeks to point out the ways in which children become subjects who are pathologized and made responsible for conditions of lack.

Through systems of classification, the experience of poverty in the United States is both stigmatized and codified. One cycle that can be especially detrimental to families attempting to escape poverty is the work/welfare cycle that tends to suck families into continual poverty by draining resources and creating family debts. The work/welfare cycle and material hardship function to put children at a higher risk of being defined by

the state as "neglected." Institutions employ systems of classification in order to require "formal" formations of family, and as a result, informal, unrecognized formations of family frequently encounter obstacles. Through processes of classification, individuals and communities of specific types of individuals can be socially legitimated or excluded from mainstream privileges, thereby polarizing and excluding in order to draw boundaries between classes of people (Douglas 1986). As instruments of organization, institutions, guided by collectivities of individuals, in particular those of elite communities build social structures and induce families to behave in specific ways if they want to acquire resources (Douglas 1986). Furthermore, friction between institutional policy and family goals results in a complex entanglement of social intercourse. Douglas notes the manner in which institutions can prompt individuals to make changes in order to acquire resources and then change the rules, placing those same individuals back into adverse circumstances. “First the people are tempted out of their niches by new possibilities of exercising or evading control. Then they make new kinds of institutions, and the institutions make new labels, and the label makes new kinds of people.” (Douglas 1986, p. 108) According to this animate model, institutions and individuals engage in an eternal dance of deconstructing and rebuilding. This model offers an explanation as to why the cycle of poverty seems virtually inescapable. As a family experiencing poverty meets the demands of state institutions, the institutions change the family's classification, which in turn prematurely terminates welfare benefits.

In order to ensure that the family system meets its needs and stays intact, families experiencing poverty must learn to negotiate the welfare/work cyclical system. Edin and Lein note that most women on welfare have worked in the recent past or intend to work in the near future (1997). Through engaging in formal or informal work, families attempt

to scrape together the resources to meet material and social needs. Unfortunately, these same practices also contribute to the exploitative classification of workers by institutions. Institutions are able to continue supporting oppressive conditions, rather than re-examining policy, because of women's need to generate additional subsistence income and their choices to meet this need through wage labor, informal work, unpaid exchanges of labor and seasonal work. These forms of work, while enabling women to meet immediate family needs, prevent women from getting ahead in the workforce and eventually escaping conditions of poverty.

Edin and Lein's research on women's methods of "making ends meet" found that families with working mothers experienced significant hardship (1997). Women found it difficult to get ahead financially and their children often went without adequate food, housing or childcare. Significant change happens only with the occurrence of historical shifts, such as those caused by war. Otherwise, the classificatory system continues reproducing its organizational structure and impels families to continue repeating required patterns. Ultimately, many families will only experience minute variations in their socio-economic situations, despite adaptations and accommodations to institutional demands. Along similar lines, Patricia Zavella documents how women cannery workers' preference for seasonal work, which enables them to maintain their primary role as mother/care giver, produces limited opportunities for advancement (1987). Through seasonal work, mothers can augment family income and create a sense of personal choice in their lives. However, the classification of their labor as seasonal and the stigma which institutions place on the willingness to perform seasonal work has long-term consequences for economic advancement. Additionally, for most women experiencing poverty, work history does not correlate with job advancement or economic security

(Edin and Lein 1997). In order to afford the essentials, mothers are forced to engage in patterns of alternations within the welfare/work cycle.

An attitude towards children as resource depleting beings, either by parents or by society, creates an environment where children feel insecure and develop behaviors that institutions define as deviant. In turn, these deviant behaviors lead to further rejection, insecurity and negatively impact a child's ability to be placed within a familial setting. If family is commonly viewed as an institution that provides support and protection for members, then children who are experiencing foster care drift must find other ways of meeting these needs. While the substitute care system ensures material needs are met until the age of majority, emotional needs require more complex solutions. From a clinical perspective, children in substitute care tend to experience problems with attachment, whether as a result of family relationships or as a result of anxiety created from being shuffled through the child protection process (Brandon 1996). Howe cites attachment behavior as "the child (1) seeking to get close to his or her parents to be within protective range, and (2) experiencing parents as a 'secure base'—a place of safety and comfort from which to explore the environment." (1996, p. 6). In western thought, this "secure base" is considered to be between a child and one primary care giver (Rashid 1996). However, this culturally specific, exclusionary model does not allow for a "secure base" provided by multiple caregivers (Rashid 1996). Crucial to understanding the experience of children who are being raised in institutions, the meaning of family and the beliefs about the potential to bond with others mark critical areas of contemplation for this dissertation project.

Nostalgic notions about the significance of mother/child bonding permeate ideas about successful child rearing in the United States. For mothers facing overwhelming

obstacles to meeting their children's material needs, these ideals are impossible to meet. In some cases, a mother who is having difficulty overcoming these obstacles may also be unable to meet a child's emotional needs. When a child's primary care giver is unable or unwilling to meet needs, parentification, a role reversal between care taker and care receiver, occurs. This reversal causes the child to attempt to meet material and/or emotional needs that are impossible for the child to attain. In her 1999 article, "Parentification: An Overview of Theory, Research and Societal Issues," Chase notes how crucial it is for children to have opportunities to perform developmentally appropriate tasks in order to prevent the following:

> *Children are consigned to a separate sphere of operation apart from the adult world.
>
> *In this segregated and less-functional status, children become burdens to their parents/society, and are perceived as depleting their parent/society directly or indirectly because of emotional, physical and financial resources.
>
> *Because of this depletion, parents/society will have less to give to their children.
>
> *In their depletion, parents/society may look covertly to their children to fulfill needs for them that children are unable to fulfill, or parents may spend an inordinate amount of energy looking for other adults to meet these needs, with little consideration given to their children. Children, in this scenario, are asked to sacrifice. (p. 25)

This framework for viewing social relationships between children and adults places importance on a worldview that sees children as an asset, not as a handicap. An attitude towards children as valueless, either by parents or by society, creates an environment where children feel insecure and develop behaviors that institutions define as deviant. For example, an older sibling who has taken on a nurturing role towards younger siblings may display hostility towards adults who attempt to offer care-taking services for her or

her siblings because it counters the child's experience of her familial role. In the case of families experiencing poverty, the parentified child may be taken into state custody. After which, attachment theory will be used as the paradigm for re-socializing the youth's behavior. Substitute care attempts to address the situation of children whose material needs are not being met by providing remedies that generally require children to be detached from their families. In situations where substitute care eventually replaces family, the child grows up and is socialized in an institutional system that does not provide experiences that mimic family life.

Networks of fictive kin relations, despite their unrecognized status by government institutions, have great significance for families encountering poverty. Families experiencing poverty generally find it necessary to utilize networks in order to garner adequate resources (Belle 1983; Edin and Lein 1997; Dodson 1998). However, these relationships frequently exist in a vacuum of stigma. Given the focus on the nuclear family unit in the United States, the need to utilize non-nuclear family members or government assistance for family survival causes families to be seen as "dependent," and therefore inferior. In cases of social disapproval by those with control over resources, stigma functions to distance the possessor of a given trait from those who do not possess that trait. According to Goffman, "Wise persons are the marginal men before whom the individual with a fault need feel no shame nor exert self-control, knowing that in spite of his failing he will be seen as an ordinary other" (1963, p. 28). This suggests that stigmatized individuals can seek refuge in communities of those who share in the same stigma. Unfortunately, these communities are by definition lacking in resources. Given the U.S. fantasy of rags to riches and the pull yourself up by your bootstrap mentality, poverty functions as an especially potent stigma. In the case of poverty, stigma fosters a

social environment where families must attempt to survive through support from apathetic institutions and social networks. The detached nature of institutions and the reliance on already overstressed networks creates a disheartening condition in which families have limited opportunities to employ networks for purposes of pleasure. Although networks have the ability to be a source of material and emotional support, Belle maintains that networks can actually cause stress and drain resources (1983). For some families, isolation is preferable to a counterproductive network. These families may choose to remain both outside the society and outside communities of the stigmatized. Still, utilizing networks, however tenuous they may be, allows families to counter poverty (Dodson 1998). Networks, however over burdened they may be, remain a necessary economic option for families experiencing poverty.

Poverty ultimately becomes the object of stigma and is seen as a burden to the rest of society. While extended kinship networks are created by families experiencing poverty as a means to compensate the lack of economic resources they may experience, they are still viewed as a negative sector of society. This attitude of intolerance towards poverty and individuals and communities that may be affected by it fosters the establishment of institutions and practices that seek to eliminate it out of society's sight and mind. Therefore, children who come from poverty that are placed in the substitute care system are classified as possessing pathological behaviors since poverty is interpreted as a mental or character defect, and not the responsibility of economic and political state structures that benefit certain social classes and marginalize others. In order to change this stigma towards poverty, questions need to be raised that go beyond past research on the foster care system that mainly focused on a child's behavior. In what ways can a child's problems be addressed that go beyond the immediate approach of

behavior modification by focusing on larger macro social and economic structures that stigmatize families and communities experiencing poverty?

NARRATIVE & VIOLENCE

The specific challenges of narrating experiences of violence add to the complexity of the foster care experience. For children experiencing foster care drift, initial experiences of violence are compounded and magnified by institutional practices. The majority of children in the foster care system have either witnessed or been the victim of violent activities. The literature that focuses on the ways in which social structures mask oppression offer frameworks for looking at the experiences of children who have been institutionalized in the wake of severe abuse. According to Marita Sturken, trauma functions to expose both the structures and the fractures of a culture (1997). According to Michael Foucault's historical work, western civilization normalizes violence by embedding it in social structures that function to minimize: (1) the social impact of trauma, (2) the social recognition of trauma and (3) the significance of traumatized subjects (1977). The traumatized subjects' willingness to accept these norms informs Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony, which focuses on how oppression is embedded in complex society and sublimated in social institutions and cultural conceptions of hierarchy that reflect the ideology of the ruling class and are taken for granted by subordinates (1972). Without the acquiescence of oppressed subjects, the ruling class, and by extension the structural foundation, would be unable to maintain control. Bourdieu's theory of the habitus, explains the persistence of these structures and the reproduction of internalized habits within society, such as racial segregation, gender

oppression and other prescribed roles that structure social interaction in coercive ways (1977; 1984). The endurance of oppressive conditions becomes possible as a result of social structures that function to organize, thus ultimately normalizing these conditions. Accordingly, children who are raised within institutions are socialized to accept and uphold these conditions.

Although blurry, the perimeters of violence as event are marked by experiences of desecration and ideas about pollution (Douglas 1966). Due to the highly emotive and contested nature of violence, scholars have struggled to pinpoint terms and concepts through which to define, to categorize and to represent violence and trauma. Studies emphasize that the nature of violence and responses to it are incessantly contested and negotiated (Robben and Nordstrom 1995). Academics have categorized violence as (1) functional, (2) formative, (3) transformative and (4) a marker of excess (Daniel 1996; Feldman 1991; Girard 1977; Taussig 1987). René Girard's survey of violence in myth and ritual argues that violence, innate in every human, works to restore social order thereby serving functional purposes (1977). In contrast to Girard, Allen Feldman highlights the formative role of violence in shaping social practice (1991). Michael Taussig attempts to pin down the slippery nature of violence by emphasizing its transformative qualities through employing the metaphor of a "space of death," which the self enters and leaves transformed, that is, of course, if he or she survives it (1987). Daniel characterizes violence as glut, overload, a state of having "too much" information for the senses to incorporate (1996). Whether the excess of violence is a result of a social function or a signal of social upheaval remains contested.

Experiences of violence typically involve an ensuing difficulty in describing and interpreting the event. The possibility and/or inevitability of repetition, coupled with the

emotive states of terror and grief, nourish trauma's potency within both the individual and the social psyche. Unspoken terror demands a re-installation of a sense of the normative and functions to socialize behavior and ensure compliance. Although terror may appear to be outside the norm of any given society, in fact, the literature on social trauma suggests that terror, which signifies trauma, becomes normalized within a community (Castillo 1995; Daniel 1996; Foucault 1973; Foucault 1977; Girard 1972; Green 1995; Robben and Nordstrom 1995; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Taylor 1997). Chronic terror may be nearly invisible to the outsider and eventually wear down the terrorized person's sensibility to its horror (Green 1995; Daniel 1996). The phenomenon of aphasia is due, in part, to the lack of a vocabulary through which to convey traumatic experience. Daniel highlights the struggle to understand and master traumatic events that are surreal by speaking about them (1996). In some circumstances, an active choice to remain silent may be made as a method of self-protection (Trinh 1993; Yoneyama 1999). Strategies for representing traumatic events facilitate movement towards agreement, which is necessary in order to produce a coherent narrative. Without frameworks through which to order traumatic events, not only can they not be communicated, but also they do not exist. Paradoxically, structure serves the dual purpose of categorizing and, hence, ultimately making it possible to normalize trauma.

Violence ultimately is experienced by most children who enter the foster care system. The trauma that results from violence, whether through physical, emotional or economic abuse, is a real issue that needs to be better addressed from a different approach. Narratives have been created and adopted throughout the history of different cultures and communities as a way of makings sense of traumatic events that many times may have been out of their control. How can the employment of narratives and/or

metaphors be utilized when working with foster children to assist them in dealing with their trauma instead of attempting to use therapy as a way to modify their behavior for the sole benefit of society that does not want to be inconvenienced by their problems?

CONCLUSION

To summarize, frameworks that focus on the development of institutional structures and their effect on an individual's identity formation, issues of poverty and family structures and the use of metaphors to understand what is impossible to utter due to violence and trauma is key to this dissertation study that seeks to analyze the effects of foster care drift among children that are wards of the state by way of the substitute care system. Questions need to be raised that seek to approach or use these frameworks from perspectives that have not been considered until now. The immediacy and temporality of the foster care system's current practices need to be questioned and reworked in such a way as to address the long term goals and needs of children since this latter approach is essential for a healthy childhood development. Poverty needs to be reexamined as a structural problem affecting many families and communities instead of a behavioral problem that stems from some kind of history of pathology within a given family. Finally, more resources need to focus on helping foster children who have experienced some kind of trauma that allow them to understand it and live with it rather than only using therapy as a way to make them conform their behaviors to societal norms without helping them have a healthier and stable life.

Chapter 3 "I hope I never see you again"

INTRODUCTION

Separation from biological family shapes the role of attachment, loss and desire in everyday lives of foster children who have been institutionalized. For these children, there are few opportunities to develop long-term relationships, and both adults and children enter and leave various settings within relatively short time spans. Children verbally express an acute awareness of the fact that institutions pay most adults who spend any significant amount of time with them. When either adults or children leave the residential treatment setting, institutional forces emphasize the impersonal aspects of relationships and categorize emotional responses as excessive and maladaptive.

In this chapter, I examine how longing and loss is a regular occurrence among girls in the foster care system and how their experiences shape their identities in relation to one another and to the larger society. This chapter begins with an ethnographic narrative to provide a context for situating my relationship with the girls. The narrative provides a snapshot of a mini-vacation that included my experiences with the girls as we traveled to the zoo. This particular narrative offers a multi-layered perspective of the recreational opportunities provided for wards of the state in relation to the experience of taking a summer family vacation, which is commonly experienced by many children in the United States. The chapter discusses the role of particular strategies used by the foster children to form relationships with others in a context of separation from family, being moved to new facilities or foster homes multiple times within a short time frame and the lack of a stable adult figure in their life due to high turnover rates of direct care

workers. Furthermore, this ethnographic narrative reveals the relational dynamics that emerge between the girls, direct care staff, foster parents and volunteers. It highlights the struggles for power that surface constantly between them and their caretakers. All of these complex dynamics illustrate the multifaceted nature of the girls' experiences with constant loss and instability. Their expressions of longing are construed as maladaptive by the state and are experienced as repulsive by many adults. Their emotional and behavioral responses, however they may be interpreted or misinterpreted, are merely a reflection of the constant flux and volatility they experience within the unstable world they inhabit on a daily basis.

SUMMER VACATION: REFLECTIONS OF THE ETHNOGRAPHER

I am driving a fifteen-passenger van. We are coming back from the zoo, two hours away, ten girls, me and two other adults. I prefer to be a passenger, watching out the window, the motion, the frontage floating, listening to the radio. Today I do not get to be a passenger.

I have been on this trip two times before. The last time we went, I sat in the front passenger seat. I was the navigator. That year, on the way home, we spent four hours driving on a freeway that went in a loop. We looped and looped, not realizing that we were driving in circles. Hours passed before we figured out that we were lost. We didn't want to upset the girls, so we became tour guides. We pointed out landmarks, theme parks, watched the passing scenery. "We are touring you around, isn't this fun, that's it, touring is fun. They enjoy being driven around, the hum of the motor, looking out the windows, moving, moving, moving. Eventually, we pulled into a gas station and bought a

map. I am not a good navigator. Before I get in that front passenger seat I tell people, I am not a good navigator. I can happily go in circles for hours. They have been warned. I am not the best driver, either. On more than a few occasions, I have backed the van into stationary objects. No dents, only taps. It happens. It is not always easy to focus in a van full of girls. I rarely speed. I am accustomed to horns and flashing headlights and engines revving. I have been flipped off on more than one occasion, and the girls laugh as I wave and let them pass.

The house-parent who is with us does not want to be here. She is exhausted. Her 72-hour shift is almost over. The girls she works with have been in an uproar all week. They just found out that three of their four staff will leave in the next few days. They are being abandoned. All at once. This house parent is the lucky lady who gets to stay on for the aftermath. It's time for the angry "I hate you, you bitch, I wish you were leaving too" phase. The defiant "fuck you, nobody here likes you" phase. The pleading phase of "everyone leaves, why can't I leave to?" The leavings, the eternal good-byes, the nobody stays behind long enough to pick up the pieces, the loneliness and the never-ending reminders of being truly alone in the world. The emptiness. It'll pass, this cycle. Eventually. For a time. Until the cycle begins again, the eternal repetition of revolt and supplication. In time, this house-parent will leave, as will I. We are not innocent of, immune to, exempt from this. We will be the leavers, the walk-awayers, the abandoners. We will move on. It happens, it's expected. But that is not today, or next week or next year, it is some unspecified time that we try not to believe will ever arrive. Today, we are there -- not leaving anytime soon.

The house-parent does not want to be here. She is exhausted. In the morning before we leave, she wants to cancel the trip. This is not a good sign. She does not want to be here. I do not want to be here. But, the girls have been waiting for this trip. It is a reward for "good" behavior, for compliance and smiles during the last month. Today we will have a twelve-hour vacation. I will not allow it to be stopped. I am determined to get on the road. I tell the houseparent that I will drive, not because it will be easier for her, but because once I have the keys, the van cannot be turned back. I want to get far enough away that it will be more trouble to return than to continue on.

After we get on the road, I pull over every half hour or so. At one of the gas stations, I come out to find three guys in their early twenties near the van. As I move closer, I can tell that they are checking out the fourteen- year old girls in the back seat. I yell at them across the parking lot and wave my fist as I run towards them, "What's wrong with you! Those girls are fourteen. You better get out of here! I will make you sorry!" These guys stammer out apologies, say that the girls called them over, then jump into their truck and take off. The little girls in the front are laughing hysterically. The girls in the back sink down into their seats, cover their faces. "Why'd you have to do that," they say, still hiding their faces as I pull onto the frontage. "We can't believe you did that, miss. Why'd you do that?"

We actually make it to the zoo. Most of us have fun. There are no incidents, only a little arguing, some minor sunburn and tired feet from walking all day. We laugh a lot, take a ton of photos. I am good at making deals. By the end of the day I have managed to save one hundred dollars. If we use our emergency money, we can go to the Spaghetti

Warehouse on our way home. The younger girls would be happy with McDonald's. But, the older girls have heard about this restaurant and are eager to go. I want this trip to be memorable.

After eating, we are full and tired. The engine hums as we move along the highway. In my rearview mirror I can see a ten year old, who I have known since she was seven. She actually announces this to new people. "I have known her since I was seven," she says. There are not many people around from when she was seven. She sits directly behind the driver's seat. In this spot, she can see me in the rearview mirror, and I can see her. Every so often, we watch each other. All day she has cooperated. She has smiled, said "thank you" and "please." It will not last, this compliant cooperation. Half way home, she begins kicking my seat. One foot, then the other. Rhythmically. I tell her to stop, and she does, for a while. Then she begins again. This continues for several miles. Normally, I would have ignored it, but after miles and miles, I cave in. I pull over, make her change seats. She kicks and screams wildly. The van is in an uproar. She refuses to move. We stay parked for what feels like a long time, but is really only a few minutes. The other girls start getting mad at her. They like an eternally moving van. Stops are dangerous. She draws her arms across her chest, groans "fine" and trades seats. Within minutes of getting back on the road she screams "you fucking bitch, I hate you" and other strings of insults. This goes on for twenty miles until she gets tired, takes a short break to catch her breath, then resumes.

And the drama continues. Men in the left lane keep pulling up parallel to the driver's window and making lewd facial gestures. I mean, this is just weird. I, like every

woman I know, experience random harassment from random men. But, this, this pulling up next to me and staring, that just doesn't happen to me. Not me. I am more than a little bit threatened. After the fifth or sixth or seventh dude pulls up next to my window, I start to get suspicious. I re-adjust my rearview mirror and wait. Within minutes, I see the fourteen-year olds in the back seat gesturing to men in cars. They think they are acting grown-up and sexy. I turn off the radio and pull to the side of the road. The van shakes as cars whoosh past. I am beyond yelling. My voice lowers, it slows, and I repeat myself too many times. "You are putting all of us in danger. There are little girls in this van. There are men out there who would hurt us." Danger, danger, danger. This is my litany. I pull back onto the road, no music, everyone silent for a while. Then I turn the radio back on.

We arrive home safely, we unload, I check in with the new shift of staff. I go to the fourteen-year old who I believe is the source of the inter-vehicle interludes. I have known her for two years, an eternity in this environment. She watches what I do, mimics me, and finds reasons to hang around me. The administrators asked me to spend extra time with her because some of her IQ levels are estimated in the genius range. She is exceptional. She is sensitive. She knows better. At least this is what I tell myself. I do not lecture her. I tell her simply, "do that again, and it will be the last time I take you with me." We both know that there will be no second chances. This is our edge. She has found my limit.

I go home, and I vomit. I take a shower for two hours. I scrub and scrub myself, but still feel gritty. In the morning, I shower again, but not for as long. The feelings

pass. I am myself again by noon. I know this ritual well… I will remember this. Vividly. I want the girls to remember, not the van ride home, but going to the zoo and out to eat, laughter and smiles. Later they will tell me -- "You took us when you didn't have to. You took us anyway."

STRATEGIES FOR SUBVERTING INSTITUTIONAL FRAMES OF REFERENCE

The question arises: What constitutes adaptive behavioral responses to ongoing experiences of loss? As seen in the previous narrative, behavior has the potential to erode social relationships, both with adults and with other children. Additionally, relationships do not have time to develop in this context. Institutional structures frequently categorize closer relationships between children or between staff and children as undesirable, or even aberrant. Therefore, engaging in behavior with the goal of establishing and maintaining close relationships seems counter-productive. Behavior defined institutionally as maladaptive actually has adaptive qualities. Successful adaptation requires an environment that supports it, and in this case, the environment supports behaviors that have been categorized as maladaptive. In terms of avoiding loss and functioning in this environment, the development of close relationships is not a realistic or productive goal. This leaves children in a cycle of behavior modification practices that does not recognize their behavioral responses as valid, and the loop of the cycle keeps them in a space of continually falling just short of meeting institutional goals.

The concept of the self (or subject identity) is central to understanding the dynamics of relationship. In particular, the negotiation of trauma impacts the relationship between Self and Other. Furthermore, the experience of loss and subsequent need to grieve marks experiences of trauma. While concepts of the Self remain contested by

scholars, much writing calls upon a formulation of self that views identity as inherently constructed in relation to an Other (Obeyesekere 1992; Strong 1998; Trinh 1993). This construct proposes that without an Other through which to define oneself as similar or dis-similar, the self does not exist. For example, without the concept of "male" the concept of "female" would have no social significance to us. Therefore, the Self can be viewed in a context of co-existence as a subject in relation to an Other. Along similar lines, movements to separate groups of people who signify the Other, such as the mentally ill, also reflect this process (Foucault 1973; Goffman 1986).

In the case of violence inflicted on humans by other humans, the recipient of violent actions moves from being a subject to becoming the object of the Other who inflicts violent actions. This processes frequently splits the subject, now object, into parts. In short, the Other has the potential to reflect back to the Self information that redefines reality and power relations, ultimately fragmenting the traumatized subject's sense of self. This process of splitting off of the Self can initially work to shield the traumatized subject by reformulating reality in terms of immediate survival needs in relation to the victimizing Other. However, this process can also prevent the traumatized subject from successfully reintegrating back into society after the time of survival has passed. Trauma has the potential to be successfully mediated through the narration of it to an Other who is willing to listen, however the process of narration remains difficult.

This process of sequencing and breaking established patterns of social relations requires a more fully developed sense of self, which can be achieved through peer networks, empathy and vulnerability. In this process of connecting with others, desire plays a key role. Desire functions as a force of motivation. It frames that which remains just beyond reach, yet is conceivable, thus potentially achievable. As such, desire forms

as the direct result of cultural influences and social norms. These factors, along with personal experience, give form to desire. For this reason, desire does not remain constant, but rather is malleable and responsive to changing societal demands grounded in historical occurrences, both on the personal level and on the communal level.

Relationships in Foster Care

Attachment theory, which places responsibility for a child's sense of well being on the primary caregiver, pathologizes responses by children that resist institutional expectations. For example, open grieving over the loss of direct care staff is viewed as maladaptive. In fact, the absence of open grieving by children over these regular losses adds to internalized beliefs that perpetuate feelings of inadequacy (Schrager 1972, Marek 1987, Penzerro 1992). Ultimately, children repeatedly encounter institutional frameworks that hold them responsible for conditions of lack. Rather than re-evaluating the macro-systems that hamper the successful placement of children into homes, emphasis is placed on how children can behave in ways that are socially acceptable. Institutions define behavior, not relationship troubles as the reason for placement disruption (Armstrong 1993, Penzerro 1992; Pfeffer 1997; Rothman 1991, Wade et al 1998). Therefore, the child takes on the responsibility for the evolution of a life path.

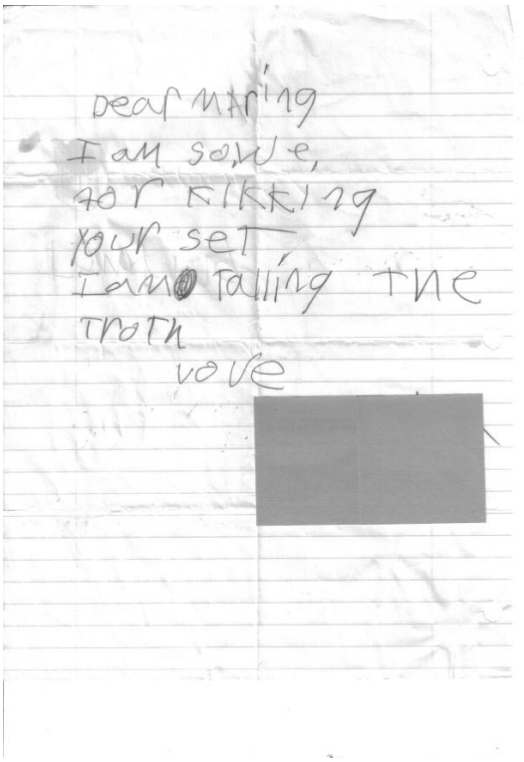
Institutional practices function to blame children for life circumstances that remain beyond their control. In turn, children internalize these beliefs and blame themselves. For example, it is not uncommon for children to internalize the belief that adults who work with them "leave because I'm no good." The girls do not fully understand that adults leave for many complicated reasons: they may be burnt out, institutional structures penalize child care workers who do not move into new positions,

some individuals are not meant for this kind of role, individuals may encounter unexpected personal crisis, etc. In my experience, adults do not leave or stay because of individual children. Rather adults leave primarily because they want to move up the job ladder, they tend to take things personally or they are uncomfortable with conflict. Some people are able to develop the skills to handle these situations over time, while other people are either unable to or do not desire to develop these skills. In some cases, these attributes become overdeveloped and counter-productive after long-term immersion in the environment. Nevertheless, an adult's choice to stay or leave has little to do with actual children and does not reflect on relationships with the children. Earlier negative experiences with relationship, compounded by ongoing problems with institutionally based relationships, can lead to internalized patterns of engaging in relationships that have a rejecting quality.

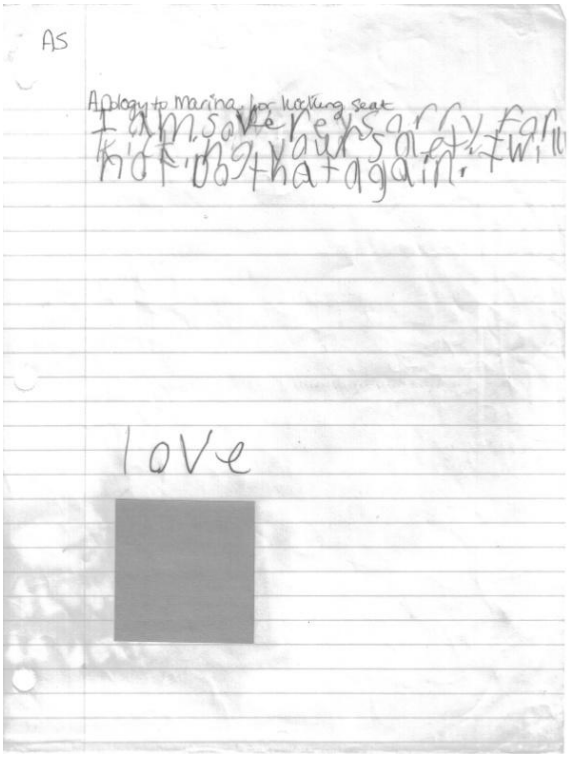
In the case of direct care staff interactions with children, practices of distancing are used to frame time and space. Frames were created through the use of jargon, time outs, humor and pages.[7] It is through the reframing of a frame that we can begin to grasp at the organization of experience. In Frame Analysis, Goffman illustrates framing as a multi-dimensional performance (1986). For example, an astounding complex occurs when events cause an individual to reframe his or her world. As an event that leads participants to reconsider their approach to events, an astounding complex includes the period of re-defining reality that direct care staff experience as they come to terms with the severity and inhumanity of the types of abuse perpetrated on the children who end up

[7] A child may be assigned a page as a form of behavior modification. For example, if a child steals, she may be required by staff to write a specific amount of words explaining why stealing is wrong. The number of words assigned is usually based on age and intellectual ability. Children are often forced to write an apology for behavior that offends another person.

at this facility. Oftentimes, the girls will engage in dangerous behavior, or performing what Goffman would call stunts.[8]



Dear Marina
I am sorry
for kicking
your seat.
I am telling the
truth



Apology to Marina for kicking seat (by staff)
I am so very sorry for
kicking your seat. I will
not do that again.

Illustration 1: Apology notes after the trip.

[8] Behavior considered to be dangerous would include incidents, such as, running away, using illegal drugs, having unprotected sex, climbing on top of buildings, using a weapon, etc.

Adaptive Responses

When thinking about the question of what constitutes an adaptive response, it is a useful strategy to focus on the ways in which behavior that is institutionally categorized as maladaptive may actually make sense in terms of the individual's overall resiliency. These behaviors frequently function to get immediate, rather than long-term, social and physical needs met. Organized around garnering material and emotional resources in the present, behaviors, such as screaming to get attention, make sense. Moreover, violence functions to shrink time into an ongoing, ceaseless present, and subsequently, the goal is to endure. The girls in this setting behave in ways that satisfy immediate needs and are resource based. Furthermore, quick and superficial attachment is necessary in order to motivate adults to provide resources and in order to gain the support of other children in the environment who can offer protection. For these girls, attachment equals vulnerability, it means caring and showing weakness, which, in turn, make them susceptible to hostile acts within the setting from other children. Finally, attracting the attention of males functions as a form of social power in the setting. In these interactions there is frequently a sense of conquest and of subverting authority, both of which index power and work to increase social standing among the girls. In short, the girls' behavioral responses to loss and connection, and the assessment of the productiveness or destructiveness of these behaviors, need to be viewed in context and in terms of realistic goals within the setting.

Material and emotional needs are essential for all humans, but especially for children who are at a phase in their life when they are totally dependent on others to meet those needs. Since they are at such a vulnerable stage in their life, children will mimic the behaviors and attitudes in their environment that they interpret as most effective in

acquiring basic emotional and physical needs necessary to survive and function on a daily basis. Therefore, children tend to adapt their behavior in accordance with the values and ideologies emphasized as the most important among the adults and institutions they interact with during their childhood years. Foster girls are placed in environments that prioritize immediate needs over long term care, so they will modify their behaviors and actions to resemble the institutional practices that focus almost exclusively on providing material needs such as food and shelter rather than other needs such as education, stable relationships with other adults and children and life skills to be independent as an adult. Furthermore, living in a fluid and transitory environment where relationships with adults are superficial and brief with a focus on therapy, or behavior modification, instead of service learning causes material resources to gain more value among foster children since they know that material needs such as food, clothing and protection are the only consistent factors in their lives. Paradoxically, immediate needs are the only reliable and dependable thing in the foster girls' experiences during their residence in state institutions like the substitute care system. Consequently, the girls will engage in whatever behaviors and actions that will assure their acquisition of these resources that unfortunately are the only constant in their unstable existence as wards of the state.

Resource Acquisition

Since material needs are seen as the most important objective by the substitute care system, the foster girls will engage in behaviors and strategies that will guarantee the acquisition of material resources regardless of how their actions and behaviors are perceived by the direct care staff at the foster care facility. In the context of the foster care facility, the girls will engage in strategies to satisfy immediate needs. One effective

strategy is superficial attachment to the adults in their environment whether they are direct care staff or volunteers. This immediate attachment is indispensible in order to place themselves in a position of preference among the adults to get access to material resources. This approach by the foster children also serves the purpose of gaining support and creating networks with other children that can provide protection in an environment where social and emotional isolation is common. Despite its effectiveness in allowing them to obtain what they want, attachment is synonymous with vulnerability. Being emotionally attached to another human being equals weakness and caring for others which in turn put them at risk to aggressive and violent behavior and actions from other children in the foster care facility. In the case of the substitute care system, foster children's behaviors are seen as maladaptive and not interpreted as resourceful or creative in their attempts to obtain material needs. Ironically, these state institutions will invest significant resources in therapy for foster children.

Behavior modification is seen as desirable within government organizations that want the individuals whom they have guardianship over to be complacent members of society. If state institutions want foster children to be more compliant, they need to adequately meet foster children's needs rather than only focus on attempting to modify and control the child's behavior. Behavior that subverts authority needs to be re-examined through a lens that sees such conduct as a result of a strong desire to satisfy immediate needs in a transitory environment rather than as maladaptive or the consequence of a hereditary moral defect.

The girls sometimes employ the use of their sexuality as a means of manipulation to get what they want, particularly from males. Since protection and power are strongly desired, and the male subject is historically seen as a symbol of hegemony, the ability to

attract a male's attention is seen as a form of social power among the girls in the substitute care system. When the girls interact with a male, their goal is to control him through manipulation of the senses related to sexuality. Their ability to control the male through sexuality provides the girls with a strong feeling of domination and of subverting authority. The more successful one of the girls is in her capability to attract the attention of males, the more her social capital increases among the other girls. In The Forms of Capital, Pierre Bourdieu argues the existence of three forms of capital: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Bourdieu defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition –or in other words, to membership in a group –which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (1986, p. 21). The "credential" among the girls is the skill of sexual manipulation, which can be used to gain the attention of males in order to meet immediate social and material needs.

The girls' public exhibition of their sexuality is interpreted as deviant behavior among the direct care staff that supervises them. Behavior modification again enters the discussion as a focal point within the substitute care system as it attempts to repress the girls' sexual expression. This is not to say that their use of sexuality to acquire their immediate needs is not problematic. The problem of the institution's approach to the foster girls is that it is not examining their behavior as a symptom of the larger problem of the institutional structure. Emphasis on therapy in institutional care for foster girls therefore serves the needs of the substitute care system and the larger American society that does not want to examine more deeply the reasons behind the girls use of sexual

interactions in relation to males. Controlling the girls' behavior ultimately does not benefit them since it does not provide them with healthier alternatives in order to meet their physical and emotional needs. The benefit is for the foster care system and for U.S. society that does not want to be inconvenienced by individuals and communities that disrupt the ruling social structure.

I hope I never see you again

This child can't stand me. She sees me coming and screams obscenities. She babbles baby talk at me. She goes inside and locks the door so I have to get out my key. This child says she has issues with me. And she does. She hates to do anything academic. Writing, fractions, Texas history is the worst. And I begin to give up on her. But every time I turn around, there she is. I don't know how she always knows where I am. But she does. And she's there. I become slightly annoyed and a bit unsettled. And she was not the loveable child of advertising. She seemed to consume everything. She had gained an enormous amount of weight, which in itself doesn't seem significant, but her features had become flattened, her skin dull, she developed a horrible skin condition on her head from not taking a shower. It feels to me like she is ready to explode at any moment, burst out of her skin. And I wonder why, if she has such big issues with me, then why does she seek me out? I just want her to work on her Texas history, do some fractions and practice some grammar. I want her to complete the worksheets the teacher sends home. I want to avoid a connection.

Summer 1999: I start my practicum project. I had carefully selected seven children, but they quickly dwindle away. One student is in a freak car accident and a few are moved to locked facilities. So I change the project, and I'm a little off balance, but around here, things change all the time. I invite anyone to participate. And I never would have guessed that she'd show up. And show up. And show up. Every time. Looking back, I should have expected it. But I didn't. She had convinced me that my mere presence would send her into a raging fit and that she just couldn't pass Texas history.

A change came over her. She asked questions. She was a compassionate child who was eager to learn and to understand. She must have always been smart, but it came to my awareness suddenly. What stood out the most to me was her body. It began to take on a form. Her features appeared. She smiled. Often. This child was dancing. And when she fell, she stood back up. And smiled.

Summer 2000: I teach a class called Wacko Matho. I like the kids to get in front of the class and teach each other. I have a list of goals: make eye contact, have a pleasant expression, use props… And I have them finish with "do you have any questions?" Today, she is teaching us fractions. I have someone coming in to take photos. She doesn't want her photo, which is typical of most of the girls. But there's something different here. She's sad and afraid. She's talking like a baby again. She says she's leaving in less than a week. For reasons I don't understand, she was suddenly being moved to a foster group home miles away. I tell her: "I'll mail them to you." She says it doesn't matter. But I know it does.

CONCLUSION

Definitions of maladaptive behavior in institutional settings need to be reevaluated when dealing with foster children. While these children's conduct and actions may initially appear problematic in relation to the foster care system's goals, a new interpretation regarding foster children's behavior is needed. Rather than viewing their behavior as evidence of their inability to adhere to societal rules and norms, foster girls' interactions with adults and other children needs to be seen as possessing adaptive qualities necessary to survive in an environment where the girls experience constant social upheaval and isolation. Few or no chances to develop meaningful relationships with adults and other children as well as always finding themselves on the margins of what is considered healthy childhood development, these children need to find new approaches and strategies to meet material and emotional needs on their own that most children are given by their biological families. Therefore foster children's adaptive responses to the transitory environment in which they reside should be viewed as evidence of their resourcefulness and ingenuity to obtain basic needs, and not as a behavioral or emotional defect that needs to be controlled or modified so as not to disrupt the substitutes care system's protocols and existing structure.

Chapter 4 Think It Over, Baby

INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to illuminate questions regarding the connections between behavior modification, status and agency in the processes of conceptualizing meaning. The fluid nature of meaning makes it impossible to control. Drawing on fieldwork and secondary sources, this chapter deciphers the incongruous uses of Baby Think It Over as a status symbol and as a device for behavior modification. This chapter examines the mutable meaning(s) of Baby Think It Over as a symbol for the institution, for the girls and for the designer. While Baby Think It Over's designer developed the technology with a specific function and meaning, the applied use of Baby Think It Over is not static. Rather, the girls used Baby Think It Over to respond to inflexible institutional structures with their own competing notions regarding the meaning of babies, in general, and of Baby Think It Over, in particular. As Baby Think It Over takes on the meanings associated with her by various parties, she simultaneously operates as a technological device for behavior modification and as a status symbol.

Once the state becomes responsible for the care of a youth, then that youth is immediately injected into a decentralized system of institutional practices, procedures, rules and regulations. The concept of safety (both preventative and responsive) is of paramount concern to the state. Youth must be provided with housing, food, medical attention, etc. Housing large numbers of youth in residential facilities requires mechanisms for social control and targeted methods aimed at behavior modification.

A TRIP TO THE BALLET

It's the holiday season. During the holidays, well-intentioned citizens donate all kinds of interesting things to foster children. This time it's free tickets to see the Nutcracker. I have agreed to take three girls to the theatre. I am always the first person asked to take the girls on trips. Nobody else seems to like going "off campus" with the girls. Sometimes the girls can be a bit unpredictable. But, I love these trips. I have been to Sea World, to the zoo, to water parks, even to see the Harlem Globetrotters -- all the major entertainment places within a two-hour drive. Donors like to fund these types of experiences. For the most part, I have a blast with the girls. So here I am again. Driving down the interstate, listening to Christmas carols, on my way to pick up Michelle, Elizabeth and Jennifer for a trip to the ballet.

I pull into the parking lot on campus, grab my bag and rush down the sidewalk, past the swings and onto the front porch of Atwater Cottage. As soon as I open the door, Elizabeth and Jennifer rush up to me. They each want a hug. Michelle stays sitting on the sofa. Smiling, but a bit subdued. I can see her over Elizabeth's head. Elizabeth, who lives in another cottage for younger children, is asking me a million questions. Do I like her hair? One of the older girls did it for her. My focus shifts back to her curly bobbing head. Before I can answer, she's moved on to more questions. Can we listen to country music in the van? Have I been to the theatre before? Then, Jennifer pipes in. She wants to sit in front. Apparently she and Elizabeth made some sort of deal about the front seat. But, I am the ultimate decision maker, and they know it. They are glowing. Their faces flushed, hair brushed, all dressed up. They smell of shampoo and soap. They are curious and ready to go to the theatre. Taking a trip is no small deal here. It requires the ability

to maintain a high number of points, to follow all the rules, to do everything right for several days in a row. They are ready to escape, if only for a few hours. They are eager to leave. I am about to go get the van keys from the Houseparent. And then I see it. There on the sofa, sitting in a carrier next to Michelle, I see Baby Think It Over staring back at me. That thing gives me the creeps. Baby Think It Over is a six and a half pound "infant simulator" made of vinyl. It is supposed to represent an anatomically correct, life-size baby, and it cries at random intervals based on computerized responses. But at this particular moment, Baby Think It Over quietly stares in my direction as Michelle sits very still and watches to see how I will respond. I have been duped by the staff. Apparently, they expect me to take four children to the theatre.

I compose myself and walk through the living room, past the ten-foot wide glass window that separates the living room from the staff office, through the office and straight into the Houseparent's bedroom where I know for a fact that the girls can't see or overhear me. The temporary staff member who is filling in for the Houseparent position follows me to the back. I don't know her. She's a PRN, meaning somebody who fills in "as needed."[9] *She hasn't been around long. I am outraged. There is no way I am taking Baby Think It Over to the theatre. No Way. The PRN Houseparent seems a little taken off guard. Apparently, it didn't seem to occur to her that I might flat out refuse to take Baby Think It Over with me. She wants to know why I don't want to take Baby Think It Over. Why not? Are you kidding me? How long has Michelle had that*

[9] PRN is an abbreviation of the Latin word that designates a prescription drug to be administered "as needed." In this context, prn refers to a direct care worker who takes on shifts in the absence of the regular staff person.

thing? Five days. At least that's what she read. She just came on shift a few hours ago. Five days? Baby Think It Over gets crankier and crankier the more times you neglect or mistreat it. Michelle has already had five days to build up the stupid machine's response level. What am I supposed to do if that thing cries in the theatre? What about the other girls? We're all going to have to go outside anytime it cries? No way. The PRN Houseparent is too overwhelmed to care if I am inconvenienced by Baby Think It Over. She has six other kids to worry about. You have to take it, she tells me. No I don't. Why can't somebody baby sit it? Why don't you take care of it? She is a little taken off guard by my insistence. She tells me that Baby Think It Over has to stay with Michelle. It's a part of her treatment goals. Well, then Michelle just needs to stay here. This gets a reaction out of her. But, Baby Think It Over is therapeutic, not punitive. It's punitive to me, I tell her. I'm not budging. Then, she starts to appeal to my emotions. Michelle's worked so hard all week to earn this trip. Blah, blah, blah. It'd be cruel of you to leave her behind. I lean over and look through the bedroom doorway, through the glass office window to where Michelle is sitting quietly on the sofa with Baby Think It Over. Elizabeth and Jennifer sit patiently next to her. I still don't understand why we can't get a babysitter. But, I don't have it in me to leave Michelle behind. Fine. Give me the keys. We'll be back by nine. I put on my happy face, walk into the living room and tell the girls "let's go."

The girls follow me out the door, glowing once again. They pile into the van, giggling and talking about the theatre. Jennifer quickly jumps into the front seat. Elizabeth sits in the seat directly behind the driver's seat. I adjust the rearview mirror so that I can see her. She lifts her chin, looks back at me through the mirror and smiles.

Michelle gets in the front row and puts Baby Think It Over and infant carrier in between herself and Elizabeth. I suppose that Baby Think It Over didn't come with a car seat. I turn on the country music station for Elizabeth and back out. The girls get quiet and look out through the windows. This is how we travel, at least for a while. Then, Baby Think It Over lets out a tiny cry. Michelle immediately rushes to insert the key from her wrist. The crying stops instantly. This causes Jennifer to start telling me how she also wants to get a Baby Think It Over just like Michelle. Elizabeth, who is seven, announces that she too thinks it would be cool to have her own Baby Think It Over. But, it's not easy to get one. They are expensive. Rumor has it that Baby Think It Over costs like a million dollars. They don't just give them out to anyone. They'll only give you one if it's a part of your treatment. It's a whole lot of work to get one. I don't respond to either one of them. I am annoyed by the whole situation. It's a vinyl machine that you feed by turning a key. Michelle listens to Jennifer and Elizabeth talk. At the stoplight I turn around and look at Michelle. I think to myself that she is serene. She looks different, maybe more lit up than usual. It looks like Michelle has taken decent care of her baby. Only one tiny cry the whole ride, she must be taking good care of it. I wonder how much time will pass before they take Baby Think It Over away. Clearly, they won't let her keep it forever.

As soon as I find parking, everybody rushes out of the van. We don't want to miss anything. We already know that we won't be able to see the whole thing. We only have two hours. Michelle moves as quickly as she can with the baby carrier. We make our way through the parking lot, past the ticket takers and into the opulent building. The girls are in awe. Lush carpet, beautiful lights overhead, everyone dressed up so nice. An usher looks at our tickets and points to our seats. Whoever donated the tickets made sure

we were close to the front. We make our way to our seats. I check out the exits, and show Michelle where to go if Baby Think It Over starts crying. I'll be able to stay with her at the back of the theatre and still have Elizabeth and Jennifer in my line of vision. The curtain goes up, and we are temporarily transported to a magical world of fantasy. Best of all, not one peep out of Baby Think It Over.

The curtain closes, and it is time for intermission. The girls were allowed to bring money for souvenirs. Each of them was allowed to bring five dollars of their personal money. There's really nothing they can actually buy. But, they want to look, and I let them. The lobby area by the souvenir stands starts getting really crowded. People are bumping into each other -- and not being very polite about it. Michelle struggles to get the infant carrier past two women and I see them give her dirty looks. Then, I look at Michelle, and I see that her eyes are shining as if she's about to cry. It occurs to me that people think that Baby Think It Over is real. Two more middle-aged women pass Michelle and go out of their way to look back with something like disgust. Elizabeth and Jennifer start to notice the dirty looks. I can't keep count of the number of women glaring at Michelle. Baby Think It Over isn't even crying. And, Michelle seems to be disappearing into herself while Jennifer and Elizabeth start to express outrage and even want to confront one of the women. I am taken off guard. Michelle is fourteen. I can't believe that so many older women would go out of their way to give her dirty looks. I take the carrier from Michelle's hands, and pretend it's my baby. Michelle stands next to me and the other girls decide that five dollars is not quite enough for a souvenir. The lobby lights start to dim, and we go back inside to see as much of the show as we can. At 8pm, I tap the girls that it's time to leave. I pick up Baby Think It Over in her carrier,

and we quietly exit. As soon as we get to the empty lobby, Baby Think It Over starts crying. This time it's a piercing on-going cry. Michelle reaches to take the carrier from me so that she can insert her key and turn off the sound. I guess I wasn't being careful enough with Baby Think It Over. We all laugh as we rush through the parking lot to the van. The ride home is quiet.

THE CONCEPTION OF BABY THINK IT OVER

The Baby Think It Over infant simulator is the brainchild of Richard Jurmain, an aerospace engineer from southern California. He developed the idea of an infant simulator after watching a public television program on sex education for teenagers. In the program, young women in the program carried bags of flour to simulate babies. Bags of flour, he noticed, do not accurately replicate the experience of being awakened throughout the night. This inspired him to design Baby Think It Over, a vinyl doll that cries at irregular intervals. The infant simulator records the "parent's" response to the crying. The main function of Baby Think It Over is to teach a lesson about the sleeplessness that accompanies the arrival of a newborn. The experience of sleeplessness provided by Baby Think It Over is meant to be a deterrent from pregnancy by providing an unforgettable learning experience using a life-like simulation. In 1993, Mr. Jurmain obtained a patent on Baby Think It Over. Working out of his garage, he made forty initial infant simulators. Realityworks, originally known as Jurmain Prototyping, was established in 1994 for the purpose of manufacturing, marketing and distributing the "world's first infant simulator."[10]

[10] With the successful marketing of Baby Think It Over, Realityworks expanded its product line to include other educational products with a focus on experiential learning and interactive technology. Their products

Educational programs that work with youth may use Baby Think It Over as a tool for teen pregnancy prevention programs or parenting education classes. The infant simulator is made of soft vinyl and features infant sounds that replicate those made by a real newborn infant. It is anatomically correct and available in both sexes and five different ethnicities. It weighs six and a half pounds and is twenty and a half inches long. The use of Baby Think It Over is meant to provide "practical" experience that demonstrates to teen and pre-teens the difficulties of caring for an infant. During a simulation, Baby Think It Over cries to show that he or she needs care just as a real infant would. The "parent" must respond to Baby Think It Over's needs in a timely manner by inserting a plastic key whenever the simulator cries. Baby Think It Over has needs around the clock. The internal computer simulates an infant crying at realistic, random intervals twenty-four hours a day. Baby Think It Over tracks its care and safe handling through the internal computer that can only be accessed by the program instructor. After the simulation, detailed data can be downloaded, including times of missed care events and rough handling. The "parent" is given a non-transferable key attached to a hospital bracelet on his or her wrist that must be inserted in the Baby for a specific length of time to simulate feeding, burping, bathing, diaper-changing and comforting. Care sessions last from 5 to 35 minutes. If Baby Think It Over has been properly cared for, it will coo to signal the end of the session. If Baby Think It Over is neglected (allowed to cry for more than one minute) or handled roughly (dropped, thrown or struck), tamper-proof indicators on the computer will alert the instructor.

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and curriculum are designed to teach career preparation, health promotion, life skills training, child abuse prevention, parenting, teen pregnancy preparation and tobacco prevention. The Realityworks mission statement is: "to improve the human condition around the globe by enabling educators to show the probable outcomes of behaviors and choices."

TEEN PREGNANCY AND THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

In general, public perception of teen mothers is negative. In the United States, there is a generalized hatred of teen mothers. Many people conceive of teen mothers as unfairly taking public resources and of being inept. Teen pregnancy places a severe burden on families and public resources. In the eyes of many public policy makers, teen pregnancy is a problem for both young people themselves and for society as a whole. Both teenage pregnancy and teen parenting have critical educational and economic costs for girls because these experiences reduce their chance of receiving a quality education, which, in turn, significantly narrows their life options (Hoffman 2006). The age at which a girl has her first child is closely related to her chances of living at or below the poverty level and receiving AFDC (Hoffman 2006). In addition, teen mothers are at a greater risk of having babies with low birth weight. For the teen parent, reduced education and employment opportunities lead to a poorer quality of life. Teen pregnancy and parenthood is directly correlated with poverty, income disparity, educational attainment and overall well-being.

Entry into the foster care system is directly related to teen pregnancy, and teens in foster care are at increased risk for getting pregnant and becoming parents. According to Bilaver et al's study of foster care youth, by age 21, nearly 71% of the young women who had been in foster care report having been pregnant at least once; of these women, 62% had been pregnant more than once (2006). Moreover, 48% of 19 year-old females that have been in foster care have been pregnant at least once and 32% have at least one child (Bilaver et al 2006). Females in foster care are 2.5 times more likely than those not in foster care to have been pregnant at least once before age 20 (Bilaver et al 2006).

Children born to teen parents are statistically more likely to enter the foster care system than children born to adult parents. 46% percent of teen girls in foster care who have been pregnant have had a subsequent pregnancy, compared to 29% of their peers outside the system (Bilaver et al 2006). Children born to a teen mother (age 17 or younger) are 2.2 times more likely to end up in foster care and they are twice as likely to have a reported case of abuse and neglect compared to those children born to a mother in her early twenties (Hoffman 2006). A study by Courtney et al found that half of 21-year-old men aging out of foster care report they had gotten someone pregnant; compared to 19% of their peers who were not in the system (2007). In 2004, teen childbearing cost taxpayers $9.1 billion of which $2.3 billion can be attributed to costs from foster care and Child Protective Services (Hoffman 2006).

SOCIAL CONTROL, SECURITY, SURVEILLANCE

For some programs serving youth, Baby Think It Over (BTIO) functions as behavior modification technology. Baby Think It Over was developed in order to be used in a classroom setting to reinforce parenting and child care skills. Studies on the use of Baby Think It Over for the purpose of preventing teen pregnancy have not found conclusive results of the infant simulator's effectiveness (Borr 2009, Didion 2004, Roberts 2004 and Somers 2006). In practice, Baby Think It Over is frequently used to act as a form of psychological birth control. BTIO may initially generate a sense of excitement, but the appeal fades as the device makes unpleasant sounds at random times. In the foster care system, BTIO can also function as a surveillance device. The

computerized chip inside the doll reports mistreatment and is only accessible to the designated instructor.

While Baby Think It Over's designer developed her with a specific function and meaning, the applied use of Baby Think It Over mirrors the setting in which it is used. In an inflexible institutional structure, girls respond with non-conventional notions regarding the meaning of Baby Think It Over. BTIO becomes a technological device that symbolizes status. The institution can control the use of the doll, but they cannot control how the girls perceive it or what they do with it. This is important because the institutional structure is different from a family setting, and for this reason objects are perceived of differently. In a residential facility, BTIO becomes a distraction from the boredom and tedium of strict daily routines. It disrupts the scheduling, provides excitement and sometimes even offers comic relief. The doll takes on different meanings for different parties, staff, administration, and the girls, themselves. While agents of the institution seek to modify behavior through the device, they easily become annoyed and inconvenienced by BTIO.

BTIO as a device with the specific purpose of monitoring the actions of girls resonates strongly with Foucault's ideas on discipline and surveillance in his extensive study on the history and development of the modern Western penal system entitled Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Foucault argues that discipline has the ability to create "docile bodies" which is ideal for the modern, industrial state where everything is regimented from the military to factories to the classroom (1977). The substitute care system wants the foster girls to be compliant subjects within the institutional structure which will lead to their not being a nuisance or inconvenience to society. As an institution of the modern capitalist state, the foster care system has the

goal of the large modern state in mind as it attempts to control the actions of foster children and make them "docile" members of the well-ordered society. However, for discipline to be effective, institutions need to conduct constant observations of the bodies they control in order to ensure the most effective method of instilling within the body internalized discipline (Foucault 1977). Therefore in this new penal context, the body becomes an "object of knowledge" that can be studied, catalogued and individualized in any form available to the modern human sciences. Foucault better illustrates this new form of surveillance through Jeremy Bentham's idea of the panopticon where an "unequal gaze," or the possibility of constant surveillance by the facility is conducted with the prisoner never knowing when the observation is occurring. Thus, the imprisoned subject is less likely to violate the law or established rules if they believe that they are constantly being watched -- even if they are not being observed at all times (Foucault 1977). Foucault takes the idea of panopticism beyond the prison to general society where these concepts of surveillance and discipline are employed to ultimately create a state where individuals police themselves unconsciously. Foucault's ideas of the penal system strongly tie into the ideologies of the substitute care system.

Children who are not adequately normalized through discourses of conformity end up in foster care facilities. The judge, child protection services workers and foster care facility direct care staff are no longer viewed as punishers, but as those agents of the state that decide with assistance from specialists of the human sciences how to better understand and cure, or discipline the child in question. Baby Think It Over can be interpreted as a form of technology of surveillance since it is constantly transmitting data of the actions of the girl who possesses it. The girl's body becomes what Foucault considers is the site of political technology that, as it is further studied, increases the

institution's knowledge, and thus allowing the dominant hegemony the ability to exercise greater power through better individualization and surveillance in an ever-increasing cycle of power-knowledge (1977). State institutions believe that this increase in surveillance and knowledge of foster girls' conduct through BTIO will result in the girls' self-monitoring and disciplining their actions and behaviors deemed maladaptive by institutional policies and regulations. Punishment, or discipline, is no longer inflicted on the body, but on the mind, or the soul, through continuous surveillance and individualization in the panopticon of the substitute care system.

THE SUBJECTIFICATION OF BABY THINK IT OVER

An unforeseen consequence of the implementation of such a device to prevent teen pregnancy is the subjectification of Baby Think It Over. While BTIO is in itself a machine or object, the girls objectify the "baby." They view the device as a status symbol among themselves and desire the social status associated with BTIO. Rather than dissuading the girls from wanting to have a baby at such a young age, BTIO becomes the object of envy and of status. The girls do not experience caring for BTIO as a punishment or chore, but rather as a reward or privilege that makes them the center of attention from both peers and adults. A disconnect with real childcare occurs with BTIO since it is seen more as a novelty or luxury, not as a daily responsibility of a possible real child. Furthermore, the parameters surrounding the care of the BTIO do not reflect the actual responsibilities concerning childcare. Taking BTIO to the ballet more than likely would not occur with a real baby. Arranging a babysitter or other means of care would be the more practical course of action. Another unrealistic "responsibility" of BTIO is the idea that you can simply place a key inside of it to make it stop crying. The action of

attempting to insert the key in the BTIO as soon as it begins to cry emphasizes to the girls that childcare is a game since the idea is to turn the key as quickly as possible with the "baby" hanging upside down. BTIO then becomes an object of social privilege and elevated status, when originally it was intended as a means of social and behavioral control.

Baby Think It Over as an object of desire and symbol of social status among the foster girls invokes theories regarding the use of possessions not only as forms of economic gain, but of social wealth. BTIO as a commodity that can be acquired and traded to accumulate not monetary capital, but social status is an important idea that needs to be examined when dealing with marginal populations such as foster girls in the substitute care system. Pierre Bourdieu discusses the possibility of other forms of capital besides the traditional model of economic capital. He argues that another form of capital important to human interactions is known as cultural capital (1986). Cultural capital includes forms of knowledge, education, skills, particular objects and social advantages which give an individual higher social status in society. Bourdieu divides cultural capital into three subcategories: embodied, objectified and institutionalized. BTIO fits into the classification of being an objectified cultural capital. Objectified cultural capital consists of physical objects that can be used for economic gain through buying and selling, or as a symbol of one's social status that is facilitated by the object in possession (1986). The girls' social status increases as they acquire and spend more time with BTIO. Their increase in cultural capital is extremely important for them considering their location on the margins of society as well as living in transitory environments where possessions and valuables are fluid and do not embody the same meanings of property as it would in other contexts. Furthermore, the cultural value of BTIO can go up or down depending on the

environments in which it is located. While BTIO is of great social and cultural significance to the foster girls, it does not possess these same qualities among the direct care staff or the substitute care system. Therefore one type of cultural capital can be at the same time both legitimate and not, depending on the field in which it is located. The legitimating of a particular type of cultural capital is completely arbitrary since its value is completely dependent on the perspective and ideology of the individual, the community or the institution.

CONCLUSION

Since meaning has such a fluid character, always changing and morphing in regards to who possesses it, the possibility of controlling or dictating its parameters becomes more and more an unrealistic goal. The paradox of controlling meaning in the lives of others becomes evident in the substitute care system through the implementation of Baby Think It Over as a means of birth control among foster girls. The alterable meaning of Baby Think It Over in the eyes of the foster girls, the institution and the creator of BTIO is further evidence of the impracticality of committing so many monetary resources and man hours in the attempt to discipline or create "docile bodies" among populations that are deemed as noncompliant and maladaptive to the modern state where order and regimentation is the ideal. The creation of new technologies to more effectively observe the behaviors of others in order to better understand how to control them is not a new practice in the modern state. As Foucault has pointed out in his study on the modern prison system, the idea of the panopticon emerged with Jeremy Bentham's plans for a new prison. However, this idea of constant surveillance in order for the imprisoned bodies to eventually monitor themselves continues to this day with

technologies of surveillance such as BTIO. The substitute care system wants to learn the behavioral patterns of foster girls through BTIO with the desire to create an environment where the girls will eventually abstain from sex through their own self-monitoring. Self discipline, or "docile bodies" is the ultimate goal by institutions for the girls that inhabit the substitute care system. Again, this strategy employed by the state is unsuccessful since the girls come to see BTIO as a toy, or even as an object of great esteem among their peers. As Bourdieu explained in his study on the different forms of capital, cultural capital, like meaning, is fluid and increases or decreases in value depending on the perspective of the individual or community. While the state views BTIO as a symbol of control and behavior modification, the girls see the device as a resource that can increase their social status among other foster girls. Since they are on the periphery of childhood experiences and live in a transitory environment where objects and homes are not permanent, BTIO allows them to grab hold of an object that provides meaning and social wealth in their lives.

Chapter 5 Clinging to Childhood

INTRODUCTION

Material objects possess unique meaning for children who are experiencing foster care drift. The experience of continual moves to different residential settings makes it difficult to retain personal possessions. These children have relatively few possessions and tenuous connections to a sense of ownership. Objects are quickly lost and replaced. In this setting, things are rapidly torn up, broken, crushed, destroyed in fits of rage, whether by the owner or some other child. When a child is moved suddenly, staff put the child's possessions into large, black trash bags with the tops knotted. This is not done maliciously, but is the result of institutional structures and the lack of resources, such as suitcases or travel bags. Things may be locked up and made inaccessible for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to, the child being placed on a restricted level system for behavior reasons or other children stealing master keys. For these reasons, objects can represent an attempt to internalize an external world, and the desire to attain an elusive sense of belonging can manifest itself through representational objects. Finally, objects can function within a system of exchange to establish or elevate social status and power.

In this chapter, I will examine meanings of cherished objects of six girls from the site where I conducted my fieldwork. As a part of an exhibit at the University of Texas at Austin, the girls selected personal objects that they wanted to share with an audience. This project with the girls was a part of a larger exhibit, Memoryscapes: An Exhibition of Memory, Trauma and Tourism, which was the final course project of the graduate

students enrolled in Dr. Pauline Turner Strong's graduate seminar during the Spring of 2001. This chapter also includes several narratives that describe the foster girls and the different objects they selected. These objects function as external representations of their internal realities. The objects selected included: dolls, recreational vehicles (scooter, skates), pets and secret items. These objects provide a deeper understanding of the role of material culture as a response to notions of family, the demands of rigid institutional structures and experiences of childhood in the foster care system.

MEMORYSCAPES: AN EXHIBITION OF MEMORY, TRAUMA AND TOURISM

MemoryScapes was a collaborative exhibition that explored theories of representation by focusing on issues related to memory, trauma and tourism in today's world. The exhibit was the result of a collective experiment in representation, and the curators included Dr. Pauline Turner Strong and the students enrolled in her Spring 2001 graduate seminar entitled Cultural and Historical Representation at the University of Texas at Austin.[11] The seminar focused on theories of representation and representational practices in multiple contexts, such as ethnographic narratives and displays, historical memory and postcolonial crises of representation. Since the objective of the seminar was to analyze the politics and social significances of representation, we were challenged with the task of conceptualizing, designing and implementing our own exhibits with the goal of them being seen, or consumed by an audience. The challenge to put theory into practice resulted in the class's collective project in representation,

[11] The curators included: Ronda Brulotte, Claudia Campeanu, Nusrat Chowderly, Marina del Sol, Inger Mey, Cassandra Moore, Leighton C. Peterson, Miriam Sobre, Dr. Pauline Turner Strong and Halide Velioglu.

MemoryScapes. The MemoryScapes exhibition program provided the following working definitions of memory and scapes:

> Memory, n. 1. The capacity for retaining, perpetuating, or reviving the thought of things past. 2. An act or instance of remembrance; a representation in the memory, a recollection. 3. An object or act serving as a memorial; a memento. 4. The capacity of a computer to store information subject to recall. 5. The first element of combinations, i.e., memory-haunted, memory-man, a professor of mnemonics, Memoryscapes, an exhibition by students in Ethnographic and Historical Representation, Spring 2001.
>
> Scapes, n., pl. 1. Views of scenery of any kind. 2. The second element of combinations formed in imitation of landscapes, i.e., seascapes, cloudscapes, moonscapes, prison-scapes, and Memoryscapes, an exhibition opening in E.P.Schoch 1.128, University of Texas at Austin, April 30, 2001.

The exhibit collection consisted of a diversity of projects that all converged around issues of memory and travel. *Technologies of Memory* by Dr. Pauline Turner Strong and Cassandra Moore opened the display with insights from Foucault and Benjamin on technologies of reproduction and subject-formation and included some of the technologies used for creating memory by the exhibition curators. *Bloody Hell! The Trauma of Tourism in the United Kingdom* by Miriam Sobre looked at trauma and tourism in the UK. *Prohibited Travels, Sanctioned Objects, and Touristic Memory* by Ronda Brulotte explored the clandestine experience of the tourist who transports contraband objects across borders. *Emblematic Memory, A Cacophony of Remembering* by Nusrat Chowderly created a multisensory project intended to be an assault on sensory atrophy. *Thousands of pictures of us* by Leighton C. Peterson and Claudia Campeanu developed educational materials based on the documentary film *The Return of Navajo Boy*. *Watching Sarajevo: Gaze Violence and* Beyond by Halide Velioglu featured distorted images, dying images and laughter. *RE-COLLECTING: fantasy, longing and*

material culture among girls in state's care by Marina del Sol and six foster children focused on material culture among foster girls in the United States.

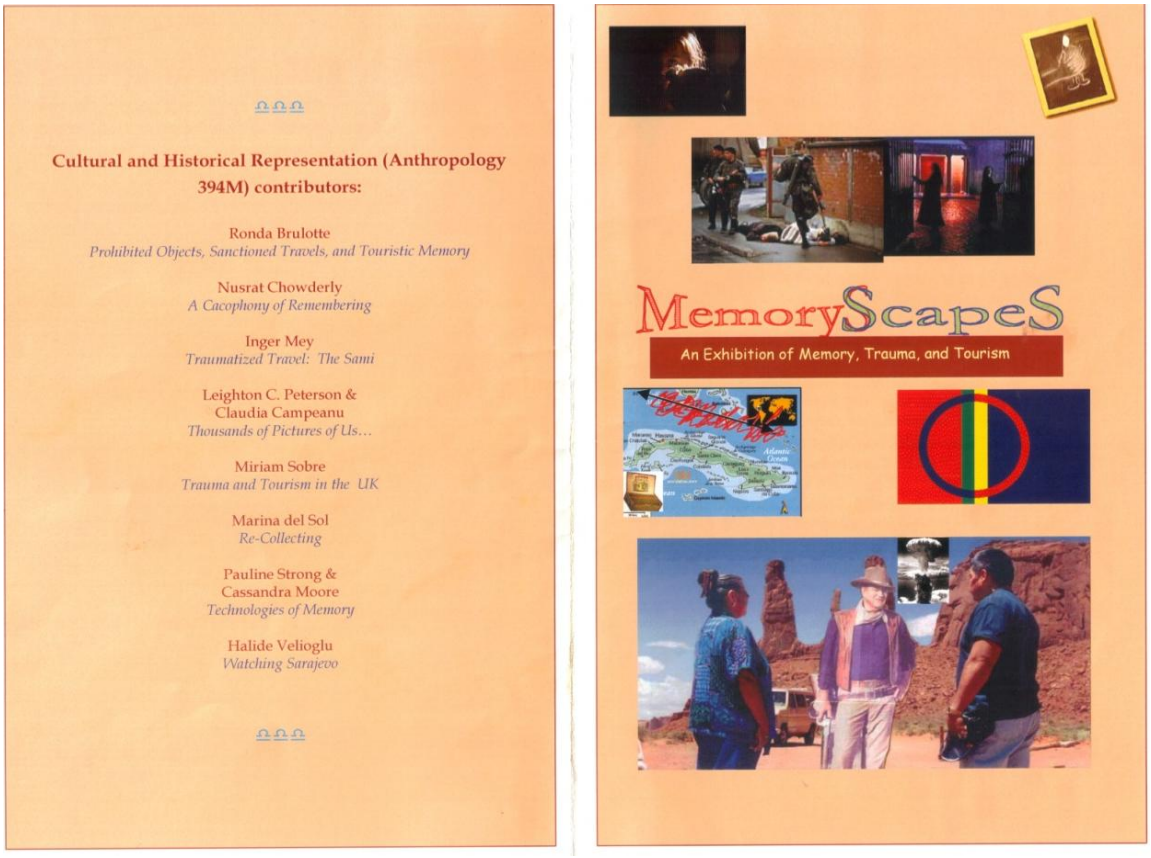

Illustration 2: Memoryscapes Exhibition Program Cover

RE-COLLECTING

The *RE-COLLECTING* exhibit explored possessions that were collected and recycled to be collected again. The re-collections were situated around fantasy and longing. The exhibit's goal was to challenge popular conceptions about what it means to be a child in the United States today. Girls who are wards of the state commonly exist at

the peripheries of nostalgic representations of childhood. For these girls, childhood itself is experienced as a time of intense longing. Therefore, the themes of fantasy and longing played active roles in their ideas about the significance of material possessions. The exhibit sought to: (1) expand the viewers awareness of the experiences of girls who are in state's care, (2) to provide opportunities for rethinking ideas about attachment to material objects, (3) to generate dialog about the meaning of childhood and (4) to identify objects that challenged the boundaries of collective childhood experiences in the United States. As a central component of the exhibit, I collaborated with five elementary school age girls who were currently in the foster care system. Together, we designed the display case, took photos and created the visual background. The girls were asked to take photographs of one of their most cherished possessions and to reflect on its importance.

This project went through several transformations from the initial exhibit proposal I had envisioned. The original proposal also focused on the meaning of childhood possessions and memory, but in addition to collecting photographs and descriptions of the objects from the girls, the exhibit was to include a scaled down replica of the girls' personal storage area. The girls store important possessions in a cabinet under their beds. This cabinet is kept locked to prevent theft. A large cardboard box in the shape of a bed was to have been placed below the main display. The box would be covered with a blanket and a pillow. The box would be kept locked since the girls' cabinets were always locked as well. Visitors would be able to request a key in order to view typical objects inside the box that a girl in foster care might have in her possession. This well laid plan was restructured after consulting with the girls. When I went to collect the photographs, the descriptions of their prized possessions and data on what they kept in their locked cabinets, the project changed directions. I still collected the photographs, but instead of

recreating the cabinets under their beds the girls created life size drawings of themselves. To create the exhibit space, each girl had the outline of her body drawn on a plastic tablecloth. She then added on drawings that represented her personal features. Each girl then selected her own pseudonym to be used in the exhibit. The final exhibit included these pictorial representations of the girls. I placed the photograph of the prized possession inside each of the life size drawings. Theories of representation were not only explored in the possessions the girls chose, but also in the drawings they created to represent themselves.

SNAPSHOTS OF THE GIRLS OF MILLER COTTAGE

The little girls are all over the place lately. They run loose; scream constantly, they need help with every little thing, tying their shoe, finding socks. They want to hold your hand, stand up real close to you. Constantly. On this cottage there are nine seven to eleven year olds. This particular week they are a rowdy group, more than usual. They are wetting the bed, wandering in the night, saying that someone is talking to them when nobody else is in the room. They suck their thumbs and cuss at everyone. There are restraints all day long, over and over, more than one at a time. This is how the project begins, a project for my school, an exhibition, how fitting. It is free time, and I walk up and down the hall asking "who wants to help me with my school?" Six girls want to. I tell them each that they can take a photo of their most cherished belonging.

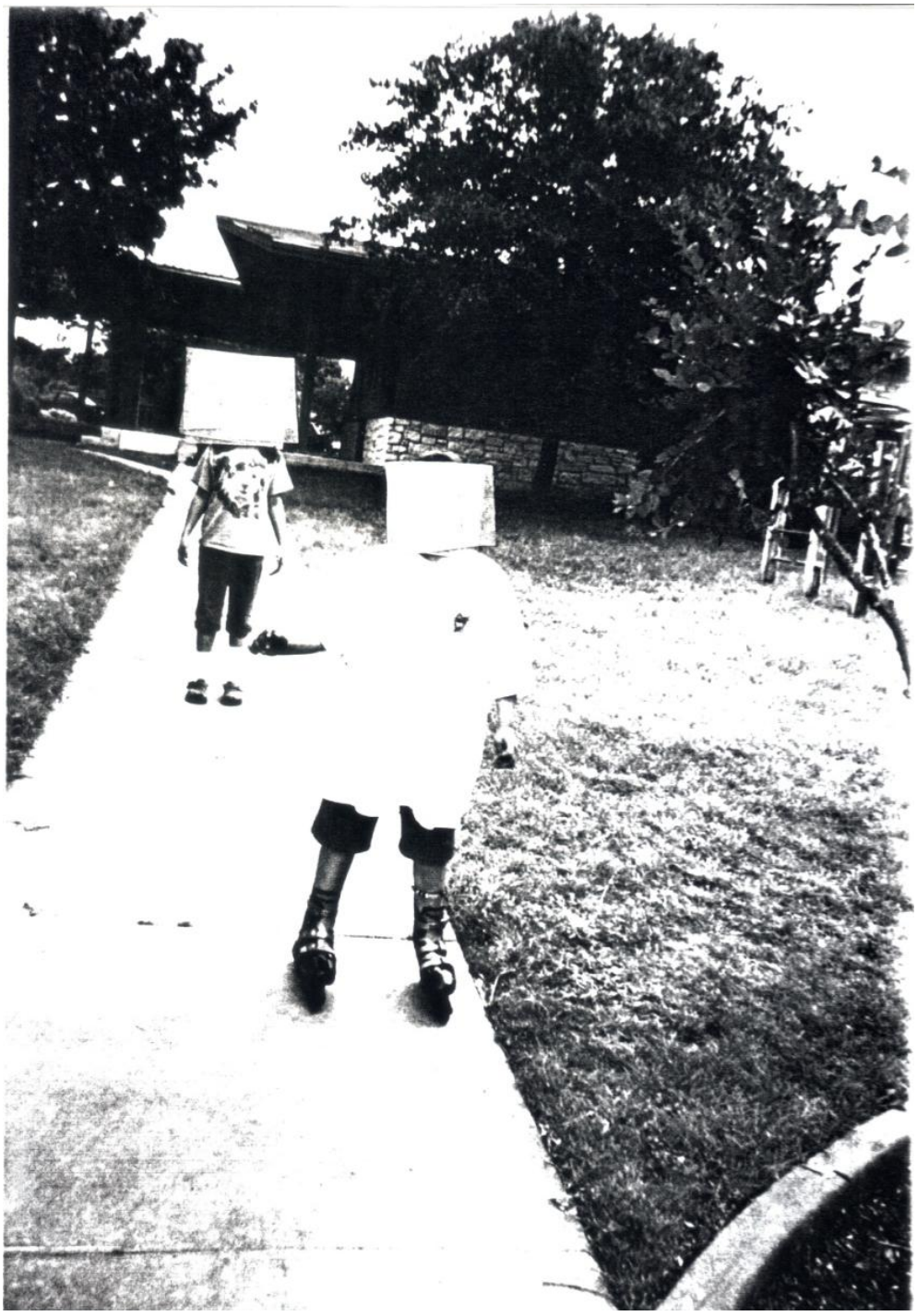

Illustration 3: Preparing for photos

Rachel, age 11

Rachel is a very affectionate and kind child. She worries that she might hurt you, hurt your feelings or hurt your body. At eleven, she is a hefty kid who smiles as frequently as she screams. She erratically moves from one focus to the next. One minute she is talking to you, then mid-sentence she is screaming across the yard at nobody in particular. I find her sweet and compassionate, but she takes up a lot of energy, so a lot of adults avoid her unless she is getting into a physical restraint. For her most cherished belonging, Rachel selects this ugly doll. Its hair sticks up. It's one of those rubber dolls with the fabric body. I think it is demented looking. Another child gave it to her last week. She arranges it carefully. She is very particular about its tilt, its arms, where it is on the desk. It reminds me of people taking baby photos at Sears. She happily arranges her doll, like an artist painting, a hairstylist holding up the mirror saying "look, look." She snaps the photo then runs out screaming at nobody in particular.

Illustration 4: Rachel's doll

Noel, age 10

Noel doesn't want to participate, that's what she says. But she hangs around at a distance, watching. This is what Noel does, she watches me from a distance, then, in time, approaches. She is the fox in The Little Prince saying "if you tame me, then we'll need each other." I will come every day and stand at a distance, let you get used to me, let myself get used to you. And when I don't come, you'll miss me. That is Noel -- the fox. She is ten and chubby, you can't see her ankles, her checks are puffy, she rarely smiles, barely talks, this child who stands at a distance watching. This is how Noel involves herself… I am sitting on the sofa, alone in the living room. She comes near and whispers, "I want to show you my object, but nobody else can see." "Okay," I whisper back, and we go to her room. She opens her desk drawer and takes it. She does not want anyone to see it. She takes her photo, quickly puts it in the back of the drawer and closes it. She is afraid that if staff found out about her most cherished possession, then it might be taken away. Someone special gave it to her. She thinks that she was about six the last time she saw him.

Illustration 5: Noel's photo of the secret object

Elizabeth, age 10

At ten, Elizabeth has boundless energy and loves to play outdoors. It is torture for her to sit still for longer than a few minutes. Her short, curly hair used to be down to her waist, but last year they chopped it off. Too many incidents of lice. She has a slight speech impediment and a loud shrill voice. She has several younger brothers, who she gets to see every few months or so. Before CPS took her, she was their primary caretaker. She fed them, met their needs as best she could, she was the mother. When she first came here, she was only in elementary school. The older girls found her annoying. Younger girls need more help. They didn't understand. They picked on her. She is used to being picked on. Now all the girls who live in her cottage are her age. She wants to be in the photo with her scooter. She rides it in circles to show me how great it is. Last year, she got it for her birthday.

Illustration 6: Elizabeth on the scooter

April, age 11

April likes to space out. She spaces out all day and if you're talking to her and she isn't interested in what you are saying, she'll space out and walk away. You can't do anything about it. She just doesn't care what people say. She usually stays away from everyone. But, lately she has been buddies with Rachel, who is also eleven. Both of them have experienced horrible abuse, things that turn your stomach, even when you think you've heard it all. But, April generally keeps to herself, which probably keeps her out of a locked facility, which is where they say they are sending Rachel next week -- as soon as a bed opens up. April is good at fading into the background, avoiding detection, spacing out in her room so nobody bothers her. She tries to be forgettable. She photographs two Barbies, one white, one black, together. Her caseworker gave them to her last Saturday. She wanted them because another child has some just like them. At thirteen dollars each -- this is what she says they cost -- they are expensive. "I collect Barbies," she says,"I have three buckets of them back home."

Illustration 7: April's favorite Barbies

Sue, age 9

At nine, Sue greets you with a ready smile. Slender and generally easy-going, she has charisma and congeniality. She does not talk much and has not been here as long as the other girls. She wants me to take action shots of her as she uses "her" skates. She loves to have her photo taken. She skates up and down and in circles. She is quick, laughing and skating.

Illustration 8: Sue wearing skates

Jennifer, age 11

Jennifer is eleven, stocky, suspicious and highly intelligent. She loves school and reading and learning in general. Jennifer's most cherished object is a pet that lives with her mother in another location. She cannot take a photo, so she writes a letter about her sugar glider. A sugar glider is a marsupial from Australia that resembles a squirrel. Jennifer's situation is unusual in that she has regular contact with her mother. She sees her pet on weekends. In time she will return home.

Illustration 9: Girls inside the exhibit

Illustration 10: Re-collecting exhibit

STATUS AND POWER IN TRANSIT

Status and power played active roles in the girls' ideas about personal property. The objects selected by the girls fell under two main categories: communal property and personal objects given to them by someone whom they considered important to their general well being.

Objects photographed and presented to the ethnographer as personal possessions included skates and bikes that actually belonged to the facility and were technically shared by all girls. The objects selected by each child came from authority figures, such as caseworkers, or from other children who were considered by peers to have high social status in the social hierarchy of the current living situation. Status objects quickly passed among the girls. A system of exchange permeates the setting and within weeks, other children owned the objects identified as personal possessions. There was one exception to this. In the case of the secret object, the child feared it would be destroyed, kept it locked up and did not share it with others. It is likely that institutional agents would have confiscated this piece of property, if only temporarily, had they been aware of its history. While superficially resembling traditional childhood objects, the objects selected by the girls indexed complicated social relations. For them, childhood is experienced as a time of intense longing. Moreover, as the participants in daily living situations change, which can be daily, the girls attempt to use objects in ways that are designed to give them status and privileges.

A common object among several of the girls is dolls. They take great pride and care with dolls, personifying them and seeing them as objects of social and economic capital. Unlike other objects or possessions at the facility, the dolls are owned by the

girls. However, the girls easily give away or trade the dolls among themselves despite the rhetoric of significance and value they place on the dolls. The girl's use of the dolls initially appears paradoxical since the ease with which they relinquish possession of it contradicts their language of longing and value about the dolls. This paradox of meanings of possession reflects the girls' reality – a world that is always transitory with few, if any, developed relationships with adults or other children. This projection of their reality onto the dolls resonates with theories of the miniature. Susan Stewart argues that the toy world, or in this case dolls, are a projection of everyday life. The real world becomes miniaturized or giganticized so as to test the boundaries of the relationship between materiality and meaning (1993). The dolls are a miniaturization, or an internalization of the everyday world experienced by foster girls; a world always in flux with temporality being the one constant force in their lives. Stewart also discusses the recurrence of two motifs that connect to the use of the dollhouse: wealth and nostalgia (1993).

April, who was mentioned earlier in one of the ethnographic narratives as possessing the white and black Barbies, emphasizes the cost of each doll. She also makes sure that the observer knows that she has "three buckets of [Barbies] back home," implying that she has access to great wealth. Perhaps the girls also want to imply that they possess a wealth of family relationships and friendships and not only materials objects. Nostalgia also appears as a common aspect of the girls' relationship to the dolls. Since the girls are constantly being moved around, they rarely have the opportunity to experience a stable childhood in addition to common milestones and relationships that occur in a typical child's life. Rachel, another girl discussed in an earlier ethnographic narrative, provides great care to her doll as if it were a real child. Her attention to detail

in caring for her doll can be interpreted as a longing for parent-child interactions or relationships that are rare or non-existent in her own life. The doll then provides great insight into the girls' lives and how meanings attached to possessions change depending on the subject's everyday experiences.

Another category of possession common among the foster girls is the use of skates, scooters and bicycles. In contrast to the dolls which are the personal property of the girls, the roller skates, scooters and bicycles that appear in the photographs and ethnographic narratives of their possessions are in fact the property of the facility. Regardless of the fact that these particular possessions are owned by the group home facility, several of the girls still chose these objects as their most prized possession for the exhibit. One of the girls, Elizabeth, describes the scooter she received for her birthday the previous year in one of the earlier ethnographic narratives. However, the scooter belongs to the facility and not to Elizabeth. Despite that fact, she is the only one who uses that scooter so in a sense it is hers while she resides at that particular facility, but once she is transferred to another facility or home she will not take it with her. What a possession is takes on new meanings in this particular context since the girls do not have ownership of the object being used but engage with it as if it personally belonged to them. This new definition or meaning of possessions probably emerges from the transitory and temporal nature of the environment that exists within the substitute care system. Since they are constantly being moved from one place to another, foster children have few possessions that will allow them to pack and leave on a moments' notice. The need to claim ownership temporary possessions actually owned by a particular facility can fill the void of a lack of material objects or possessions they may feel. Environments

are fluid and temporary. As a result, possessions acquire these same attributes among the foster children.

CONCLUSION

Possessions shape and are shaped by identity. Cherished objects or possessions are of particular interest since they tend to reveal those experiences, memories and beliefs that have the most significant effect, whether positive or negative, on an individual's life. In the case of girls in the care of the state, the material objects they deemed cherished possessions reflected typical childhood experiences in a context of an unstable and transitory environment. The spaces they inhabit lack any visage of permanence that is considered typical in experiences of childhood in the United States. Objects therefore, echo the same characteristics as the environment; easily transferred from one child to the next, communally owned, lost or destroyed. Making a claim of ownership of communal objects reveals a desire for social status. Longing for a sense of belonging and yearning to feel important within various social circles also shapes personal connections to objects. Since possessions within the foster care system possess such tenuous relationships with the foster child, the girls' desire to publicly claim ownership of specific objects reflects social status.

Chapter 6 Always Starting Over

INTRODUCTION

The substitute care system generates an overwhelming sensation of incoherence and inconsistency, which are detrimental to social development. This generalized sense of instability is the result of the state's inability to create social structures and programs that successfully address the long-term needs of children. As a result of this, institutions that serve foster children are predisposed to focus on temporary and immediate issues because they involve more basic needs with more apparent and accessible solutions. Temporary needs usually include a safe place to sleep every night, meals, medical care and activities to keep the child occupied. Immediate needs may include a focus on therapy, or behavior modification with the intention to make sure that the child conforms to societal expectations. While the foster care system's objective may be to provide long-term stability to children who have been removed from their homes, it fails to acknowledge or adequately address other child development issues, such as a quality and consistent education and continuous adult figures. This results in a lack of opportunities for a child to develop skills that will instill a sense of empowerment. Instead, foster children are caught in the role of always being the recipient of care and material goods, which, in turn, defines them as resource depleting beings.

Ever-changing environments, coupled with a strong sense of feeling powerless and ignored, typically impede normal childhood development. Youth learn to negotiate the system by maintaining an appearance of disconnection, which runs counter to mainstream notions of family systems. For example, residential programs tend to

emphasize policies regarding physical affection. The use of side hugs and "high-fives" are encouraged as alternatives to giving normal forms of physical affection (e.g., holding hands). Children who have been sexually abused can have difficulty exchanging appropriate physical affection or may not be able to ward off affection that is unwelcome. The foster care system wants to protect the children against potential predators or inappropriate adults who may take advantage of them. The system is so transitory with care workers and volunteers constantly coming and going that children are always at risk. This constant turnover of adults working with children also prevents both the adult and child from developing deeper emotional connections, which are central to emotional development. Foster children, like most children, mimic the behaviors and attitudes they are exposed to in the environment they inhabit. Therefore, an aversion to physical affection and deeper emotional bonds, which is emphasized by the system, is communicated to children who experience foster care drift. Instead of experiencing a trajectory of typical life stages (childhood, adolescent exploration, work), youth experiencing foster care drift age out of care and enter the world alone.

Children who experience foster care drift are raised within a system of institutional structures that attempts to substitute for family. This system of foster families, extended kin and facilities operates as a series of stations as the children migrate within the foster care system. Substitute care institutions need adult care workers and volunteers to interact with foster care children on a daily basis. Many adults who work within the foster care system only stay for a brief time period due to high turnover rates, burnout and better professional opportunities that may arise (Festinger 1983). Although it is standard for direct care workers to be asked to make a one-year commitment to a position, it is not uncommon for a new worker to become overwhelmed and to resign the

position within a few months – or even days. Moreover, direct care workers typically transfer into non-direct care roles after a few years, and it is rare for a direct care worker to stay in a position for more than a few years. In addition to the challenges posed by a lack of continuous adult/child relationships, a lack of consistency also plagues the educational experiences of many foster children. Depending on behavioral issues, a child may be transferred from facility to facility, from foster home to group home and from school to school. Changes in residence(s) can cause some foster children to attend different schools in different districts throughout any given year. Most teachers are not adequately trained to deal with this specific population both in terms of behavior and in terms of the enormous educational gaps caused by the moves. Obstacles to the future educational success of foster children include: weak networking relationships between schools and foster care facilities, insufficient or remedial training among adults who work with foster care children and a de-emphasis on the necessity of learning basic math and writing skills which will assist youth in their transition to adulthood.

CONVERSING WITH EXISTING RESEARCH

As a qualitative study, this dissertation project offers a longitudinal view into the lives of foster children who experienced foster care drift. Other longitudinal studies of residential facilities serving foster children include Penzerro's study of boys in Texas (1992), Wills study of boys in England (1970) and Marek's memoir of an agricultural treatment program (1987). Studies conducted at residential treatment sites for both children and adults tend to focus on caretakers (Buckholt and Gubrium 1979 and Luske 1990), or they focus on children who have already aged out of care (Festinger 1983). Other studies have used surveys, program data, client data and interviews (Epps 1998,

Rothman 1991, Wade et al 1998, Festinger 1983, Knitzer 1982). Currently, there are very few studies of actual children while they are in the foster care system (Marek 1987, Penzerro 1992, Wills 1970). This dissertation study examines social practices engaged in by foster children that correspond to the adult practices described by foster children who have already aged out of care (Knitzer 1982). The social exchanges that are effective in the substitute care setting simply do not socialize norms that are beneficial to children after they age out of care. Once aging out of care, youth continue to engage in the same social practices that were learned and reinforced while in state's care. The reality of life after age eighteen is that foster children are generally unable to locate stable housing, to sustain employment, to pursue educational opportunities and to maintain financially constructive relationships. In turn, this leads to dangerous living conditions and higher rates of criminal activity.

The inability to address the voice, or needs of a child in the foster care system stems from the substitute care system's main purpose of addressing immediate problems rather than looking at a child's needs in the long term. The site where I conducted my field research refers to this immediate approach as "putting out fires." The urgent need to continually address immediate problems that crop up rather than focusing on long-term issues contributes to what is known as "placement breakdown." This occurs because the children are desperate to be placed, and the state makes decisions regarding the child's well being in the immediate future, not the long term. This dissertation, therefore, argues for the need to look at children's needs and experiences longitudinally and to see beyond the immediate problems. Placement breakdown and other problems might be resolved if long-term approaches with extended vision were implemented to provide stability in a child's life. Paradoxically, most foster care children who are interviewed once they have

aged out of state care complain that they felt that they did not have a voice in the system. They also believe that the state hindered their development rather than actually helping them to successfully transition to the adult world. In addition to the frustration expressed by foster care children, many adults that work with this population of children feel this same frustration that the system does not provide adequate opportunities for these children to express their concerns and needs. These adults work with programs and organizations that strive to provide a voice for foster care children, such as CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate). In general, youth need a greater voice in the process.

This dissertation project took a different approach by looking at the lives of children as it was going on in the foster care system. Methods using fieldwork as the central approach provided a foundation for this project. Fieldwork is central to understanding the experiences of foster children. Studies and reports based on program data, client data and surveys are useful, but they can also play a dehumanizing role by turning the children into statistics. The foster care system offers few opportunities for youth to develop relationships with the same adult over time. Therefore, this dissertation research project was possible since I was able to develop a relationship with the youth over the course of several years. Before embarking on this project, I had spent several years with the girls as a tutor and summer educator doing recreational activities. I completed four preliminary studies at the same site. I entered this project with a previously established relationship with each of the children, so I was already a part of their world. More importantly, they understood me to be an adult who would be leaving their lives in the near future. I was a stable figure in their weekly lives and routine. Furthermore, this dissertation research is unique in that I spent time with the youth for long periods rather than brief encounters through interviews. Activities with the children

included eating dinner with them on a regular basis, attending school functions and other activities that a guardian or parent might do for a child. However, it is important to emphasize that never did I see myself as their parent or taking the place of a parent or family member. During my time at the site, the children were never forced to participate in the projects, but were given the option to accept of their own free will. The children were also never given any kind of consequence should they choose not to participate, or choose to stop participating after they had initially agreed to be a part of the research project.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

In order to change the bleak future that lays ahead for many foster children, there must be service learning opportunities, continuity of education and continuity of care. The idea of continuity is essential for what is considered a normal and healthy development during an individual's childhood. Regrettably, the foster care system is commonly only tasked with meeting the immediate needs of children placed in its care, which usually includes basic needs such as food, shelter and adult supervision. All other needs become secondary in importance. Adults who work in the substitute care system are primarily trained to address immediate needs. More training opportunities need to be provided to better meet these needs, and programs need to be put into place that support a continuity in direct care workers over time. Furthermore, the substitute care system needs to be reformatted in order prioritize education services, to decrease the turnover in adult/child relationships and to develop service learning programming that will foster self-efficacy.

Unfortunately, the common practice within the foster care system is to only provide services and material resources to foster care children rather than providing them opportunities that allow them to serve and help others. Service learning is a practice and policy that will benefit children since the focus is on their development as potential leaders and caregivers. Cultivating a sense of social responsibility allows foster care children to feel a sense of empowerment. Youth need to be given opportunities to take on leadership roles rather than always being the recipient of aid. When they are the recipients of aid, it creates a cycle of entitlement and disempowerment. If they had more opportunities to voluntarily offer assistance to others, the youth would feel more accomplished and emotionally satisfied. Youth want and receive satisfaction in helping others rather than just constantly receiving.

In addition to service learning, children need a continuous educational experience. If a child is constantly moved around from school to school, it will be almost impossible for them to receive an adequate education regardless of their IQ level. The education system has a natural progression system such as learning addition then subtraction and finally multiplication in math. There is a strong benefit to having the same teacher over a longer period of time. There is no evidence of a deficiency in intelligence that would indicate an inability to learn among many foster children. Continuity of education is an issue that commonly is not prioritized by the foster care system.

Several policies can be introduced to improve the quality and continuity of education among foster children such as better and adequate teacher training, better networks between schools and foster care providers and more focus on skills training instead of behavior modification. Foster children are commonly placed in schools where

teachers are not trained to deal with their particular emotional and educational needs. Better training would allow the teacher to focus on providing the education and the skills that a child needs instead of spending all of their time trying to manage the child's behavior -- or worse yet -- not wanting to work further with that particular child. This problem of assuring that foster care children receive a proper education can also be addressed through the establishment of reliable support networks as the child moves around to different foster care sites. The foster care system is an extremely transitory environment where children experience multiple transfers between different facilities and foster homes. This constant movement forces the child to enroll in a number of different schools over several years, or even within the same year. This cycle of constantly restarting or attempting to adapt to new school curriculums is mentally and emotionally taxing on a child. Creating a network where both the schools and the foster care facilities maintained more detailed documentation and notes on a child's educational progress would allow each school that will receive a foster care child to better address the educational materials and skills needed by that child. Finally, spending more time and resources on education and job training will benefit foster care children as they begin to age out of care. Education that will assist in the child's development and will determine his or her future ability to function must not be interrupted. Unfortunately, the substitute care system is concerned with maintaining order above other needs. Focusing on the immediate future tends to privilege the maintenance of order. The axiom is that there exists a hierarchy of needs, and behavior modification always finds its way to the top of the list. Ultimately, priorities center around addressing short-term, immediate problems instead of focusing on the long term.

Just as students need learning environments that are continuous, they also need stability of care. The entire framing of the foster care system is based ideas that a neglected child needs love and financial donations in order to have a happy life, but the situation is more complex. If there was better training and more realistic portrayals of the foster care system, adults coming in to the system to volunteer or work as direct care providers would be better prepared to address a child's needs. Unfortunately, the transitory nature of adult roles in the foster care system, also contributes to a child's instability. Some facilities have excellent training programs for adults, while other facilities have inadequate methods for making sure that adults working with foster children know how to appropriately work with that population. There is an inconsistency between institutions in what constitutes adequate training of adults. For example, a facility may allow a direct care worker to receive two training hours for watching the Silence of the Lambs, which depicts the experiences of a serial killer. An adult in another facility may received training on brain development and mental health issues from a licensed professional. These two activities are not differentiated by the system. Workers are simply required to have a specific number of training hours. Since the environment is so transitory, there is no incentive to provide adequate training to incoming adults or for seasoned workers to seek out more demanding training activities.

Hugs are not enough. It is common for volunteers and new employees within the institutional foster care system to have altruistic motives, which are genuine and intended in the best of ways. In many cases adults may think that giving the youth heartfelt love will solve all the problems. This is simply not possible in this context. It is not uncommon for some of those same altruistic adults to become disgusted when confronted with some of the undesirable and even abhorrent behaviors that are common among

youth experiencing foster care drift. This population of children has, in fact, become throw away children who are "unlovable" by any typical expectations. Marketing designed by the system to seek out foster parents, volunteers and staff uses images of clean, adorable children with smiling faces. Images are of "attractive" toddlers or young children who give the impression of good physical fitness. The problem is that when confronted with actual children experiencing foster care drift, the average adult is frequently put off. I believe there needs to be broader public education regarding the needs of foster children with an emphasis on the benefits to society when foster children are provided with services and support. Providing children with more coherent services would decrease the long-term financial and social cost to society. A higher functioning workforce that is not in need of health, mental health, food and housing services benefits everyone. The cost of the justice system is high, and when children are provided with long-term stability and services beyond age eighteen, it lowers the rate of criminal activity in the general population.

The continuity of experiences for children in the foster care system as well as the children's desire to experience situations of empowerment are issues that have consistently surfaced throughout this dissertation project. The United States educational system already encounters a number of problems, and children who have entered the foster care system are adversely impacted by and let down by educational institutions. Interestingly, the state, which is the guardian of foster children, is extremely neglectful in ensuring the adequate education of foster children. A child's deviant behavior becomes the focus, instead of ensuring basic educational progress. Instead of giving children with behavioral issues opportunities to take on leadership roles in the classroom, they are ostracized. In short, when the state becomes responsible for a child, responsibility

becomes dispersed and the child suffers long-term and devastating consequences.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Further studies on the substitute care system need to address methods for providing more effective services to foster children. Key issues include: (1) the role of race in the foster care system, (2) the idea, or misconception that girls are not aggressive, (3) models of authority used in foster care institutions and (4) the problem of teen pregnancy.

Race is a social construct that changes its meaning in relation to an individual's experiences, and its constructed nature becomes particularly exposed in relation to institutional structures that function as family. Girls who have been raised within the foster care system conceptualize race in vastly different terms than do children raised within familial settings. While foster children will encounter the racial prejudices that exist in the larger society, they will not necessarily identify with or form connections with the same racial groups assigned to them based on phenotype. The foster girls' perspectives on race differ from those that are normalized by society. For them, race is constructed based on life experiences. For the child raised outside of familial settings, ideas about race become complicated because she is being raised in the culture of the institution.

Another pertinent problem that prevails in the foster care system is the misconception that girls are not aggressive. Given that gender is socialized, gender stereotypes about girls have impacted the types of services they receive while in substitute care. Funding and programming for boys experiencing aggression are more

readily available. Programs for girls rarely receive funding since girls are not considered aggressive in the same way as boys. Girls are stereotypically viewed as engaging more in relational aggression rather than acts or threats of physical violence. Creating such an over-arching conception based on gender is problematic when attempting to address the emotional and mental needs of female foster children. Girls who experience foster care drift frequently take on behaviors that are considered aggressive and violent towards others, which is a common reason a child may be placed in a locked facility or residential treatment center. Most individuals, regardless of gender, when exposed to aggression or live in aggressive environments over long periods of time learn those behaviors.

There is also a need to focus on the social and emotional dynamics surrounding obedience to authority. Foster children who experience foster care drift and are diagnosed with some form of emotional disturbance are often unwilling to submit to forms of authority that have not earned their respect. Many of these children strongly feel that respect should be earned rather than be imposed by some arbitrary system. When they are asked to behave in a way that does not make sense or seem logical to them, they simply refuse to comply with the rules and expectations set by the adults. Authority that appears unjust and unfair also is hard for them to acknowledge as legitimate. More research studies are needed to find non-punitive solutions that better address the needs of children who question authority.

Teen pregnancy is a huge issue in foster care. Current methods that attempts to tell foster children not to have a baby are not working. Pregnancy rates among foster children are astronomically high compared to the national average. If an individual is lacking a family, it is natural for that person to have a strong desire to create their own despite the risks or lack of preparation. Boys who have entered the foster care system

also have higher rates of fathering children than the general population. More research studies need to be conducted that focus on children being born to foster care children. Recently, some shelters have been developing facilities that allow teen moms to reside with their children. This is a generation of foster children being raised in foster care from infancy along with the mother. These new facilities are creating a new social dynamic where both the mother and the child are in state custody.

Hopefully, these suggestions for futures studies will provide new insights into the unique experiences of foster children. Furthermore, future studies have the potential to impact the substitute care system positively by providing care and services that better meet the specific needs of foster children. Acknowledging that problems exist in the foster care system, such as teen pregnancy and aggression among both boys and girls, is only the first step in allowing for the development of programs that provide better services. The ultimate goal is to make sure that foster children can experience a childhood that provides the resources necessary to function in society after aging out of care.

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